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September 2015 | Issue 204

JOANNE HARRIS

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How to enjoy the city when time is short

THE BEST OF FRENCH CUISINE

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- Make the perfect pumpkin soup
- Food and wine matching
- Wines of the month

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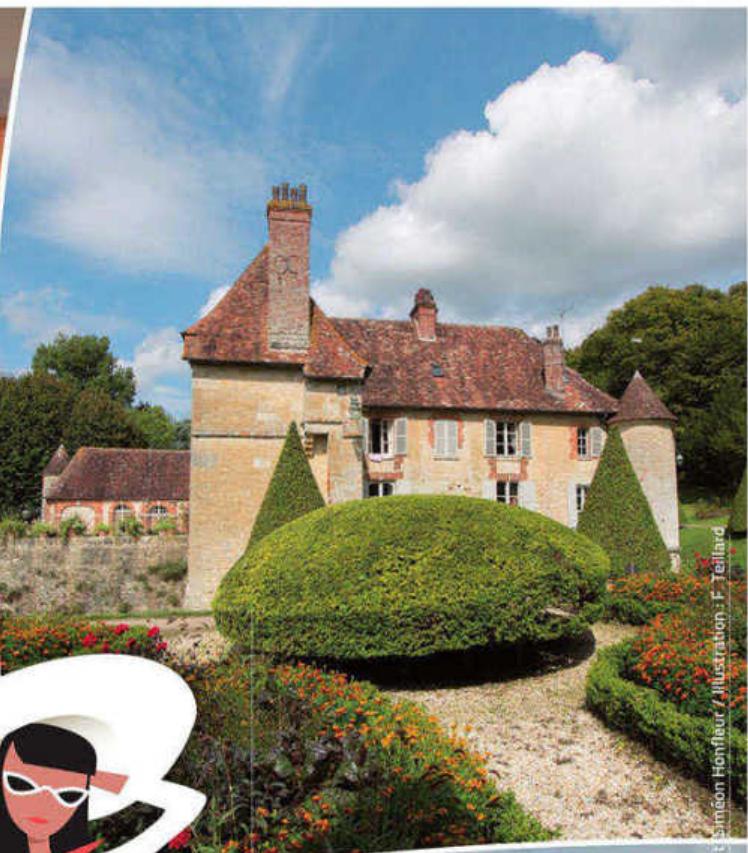
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Calvados
Un amour de Normandie



Diners encircle the fountain in Place du Thouron in the
Plus Beau Village of Seillans, in the Var département

The finer things

With September comes *les vendanges*, when vineyard owners all over France collect their grapes for the new vintages. With so many delicious French wines available, the choice can be mind-boggling, even for those who are familiar with the various *appellations*. To demystify some of Burgundy's best wines, deputy editor Simon Reynolds joined a trip on board a luxury barge and had a masterclass in tasting some of the most delicious wines. For those choosing wines in France's *caves à vin* or supermarkets, the labels can also be fairly confusing. To help you make the right choice, Dominic Rippon brings us a useful guide to reading French wine labels. And if you want to join in with the harvest, our guide on page 19 shows you how.

Of course, wine plays a key part in French

gastronomy and, for this issue, Ray Kershaw traced the history of one of France's most famous books on the subject to the town of Belley in Ain, where he found the setting was a feast for the eyes, as much as the cuisine was for the stomach.

Perhaps a better-known area for gastronomy is the Dordogne Valley, where vineyards, walnut groves and truffle orchards nestle among the golden cliffs close to the famous river. It makes a wonderful destination for autumn, as I found last year, when – even in mid-October – the temperature soared to 27°C. What better way to enjoy it than in an open-top sports car?

Finally, if you're looking to plan your trips for 2016, then our beautiful *FRANCE Calendar* is now available. Details are on page 70. Whatever you do this month, I wish you *bon voyage* and *bon appétit!*



Carolyn
Carolyn Boyd
Editor

PHOTOGRAPHS: MICHEL CAVALIER/HEMIS.FR, KYTE PHOTOGRAPHY

Joanne Harris

Best-selling author Joanne was born to a French mother and an English father. Her novels include *Chocolat* and she has co-written three cookery books. On page 33, she recalls childhood summers spent at the market in Noirmoutier-en-l'Île.



Kate Chappell

Former *FRANCE Magazine* assistant editor Kate Chappell runs the website www.theweekenders.co.uk, but visits France whenever she can. On page 76, she retraces the life of one of the Middle Ages' most powerful women, Eleanor of Aquitaine.



Paul Bloomfield

Paul has been writing about and photographing travel for 15 years, editing guides for the publisher Lonely Planet, and then as an editor and writer for magazines and newspapers. On page 72, he visits the village of Beuvron-en-Auge in Normandy.



CONTRIBUTORS

CONTENTS

September 2015



36

WIN
GREAT PRIZES
TO BE WON

FIND SERGETTE THE SNAIL - 20
TAKE A PHOTO - 34
WRITE A LETTER - 34
DO A CROSSWORD - 97



62

● TRAVEL

08 FRANCE AT A GLANCE

Let our stunning images take you on a whistle-stop tour of France.

17 PRÊT À PARTIR

Plan your next trip with our round-up of travel news and events, and route map.

26 ROAD TRIP

Follow the Atlantic coast on a leisurely drive from Nantes to Bordeaux.

36 RELAXING HOLIDAYS

Find the perfect places to chill out with our accommodation guide.

44 DORDOGNE VALLEY

Explore the dramatic landscape of the Lot in an open-top sports car.

52 PARIS IN A DAY

Make every second count on a tour of the capital from dawn until dusk.

57 FLOATING WINE ACADEMY

Board a luxury barge in Burgundy and learn about the region's finest wines.

62 LE BUGEY

Discover the little-known region that inspired the father of gastronomy.

72 BEUVRON-EN-AUGE

Take a stroll through the Normandy village that was saved from ruin.

● JOIE DE VIVRE

15 STEPHEN CLARKE

Our Paris columnist explains how art and café life go hand in hand in the city.

33 MARKET VIGNETTE

Best-selling author Joanne Harris recalls childhood visits to Noirmoutier-en-l'Île.

● BON APPÉTIT

79 RISE OF THE CROISSANT

Read the conflicting tales on the origins of France's most famous breakfast pastry.

80 FOOD & WINE

Join a celebration of French gastronomy, and savour our wines of the month.

82 THE PERFECT PUMPKIN SOUP

Rosa Jackson has a warming bowl of earthy flavours to brighten autumn days.

84 EATING OUT IN BORDEAUX

Find a restaurant to suit your pocket in this exciting hub of the wine trade.

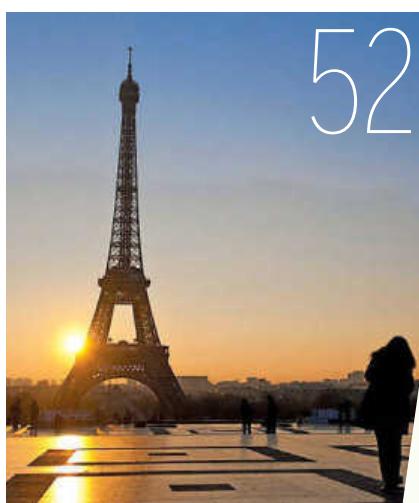
89 TAKE HOME

Blogger Clotilde Dusoulier turns canned sardines into a delectable treat.

90 KNOW YOUR WINES

Dominic Rippon shows how to decipher the label on a bottle of French wine.

SEE PAGE 43 TO SUBSCRIBE TODAY! ORDER YOUR CALENDAR ON PAGE 70!



LA CULTURE

76 HISTORY TRAIL

Follow in the path of Eleanor of Aquitaine, a queen of both France and England.

92 REVIEWS

All the latest films and books. Plus five minutes with author Catherine Alliott.

94 LANGUAGE

We find the best resources for brushing up your language skills.

96 LANGUAGE GAMES

Improve your French with our great selection of fun puzzles and games.

106 JENNY POWELL

The television presenter talks about holidays spent in a Riviera hideaway.

EVERY MONTH

23 HOLIDAY PLANNER

Organise your next trip with our handy guide to travel routes.

24 TRAVELLERS TALES

Discover where three visitors to France love to visit and what they like to do.

28 NEWS

Read about France's preparations for the Uefa Euro 2016 football tournament.

34 BOÎTE AUX LETTRES

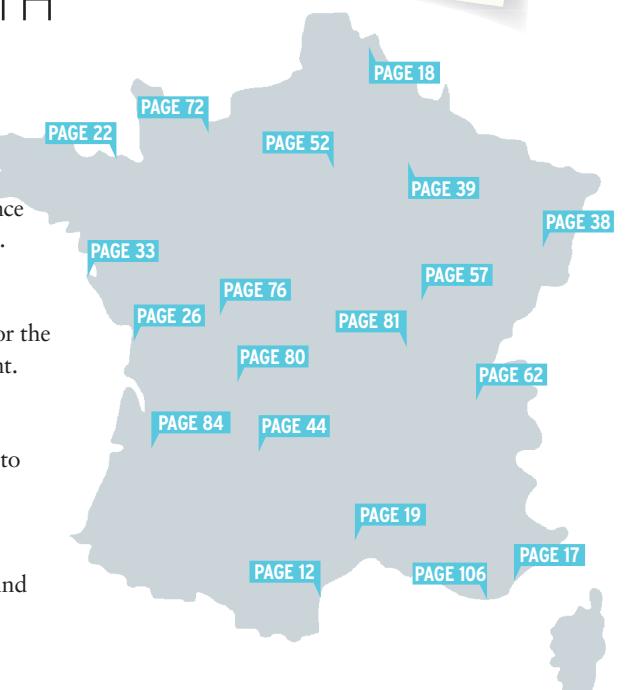
Have your say and share travel tips to win a great prize.

98 HOLIDAY RENTALS

Use our region-by-region guide to find the property that suits your needs.

104 PETITES ANNONCES

The contact details you need for a successful holiday in France.



ON THE COVER

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COVER IMAGE: THE CHÂTEAU DE LA TREYNE OVERLOOKING THE RIVER DORDOGNE IN THE LOT DÉPARTEMENT BY JEAN-Louis NESPOULOUS



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ABOUT US

FRANCE Magazine is Britain and North America's best-selling magazine about France. Since 1990, it has enchanted readers with its stunning photography and excellent travel writing. Alongside its inspirational and informative travel articles, *FRANCE Magazine* offers features on food and wine, language and history, culture and current affairs; together, it gives readers the perfect taste of the very best of France. It truly is the next best thing to being there.

QUI SOMMES-NOUS ?

FRANCE Magazine est une publication de première qualité, rédigée en anglais et consacrée exclusivement à la France. Depuis 1990, cette publication mensuelle à la réputation incontestée, domine le marché francophile en Grande-Bretagne et aux États-Unis. A travers des articles de voyage, des rubriques gastronomiques et linguistiques, *FRANCE Magazine* invite ses lecteurs à découvrir tous les meilleurs aspects de l'Hexagone et de ses produits.

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OUR AWARDS

2014

- Winner of Travel Article of the Year at the Abtof (Association of British Travel Organisers to France) Travel Article Awards **Ray Kershaw**
- Runner-up for Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Article Awards **Judy Armstrong**
- Runner-up for Young Writer of the Year at the Aito (Association of Independent Travel Operators) Awards **Zoë McIntyre**

2013

- Winner of Young Travel Writer of the Year at the British Travel Press Awards **Zoë McIntyre**
- Winner of Best Travel Article at the Outdoor Writers' & Photographers' Guild **Judy Armstrong**
- Runner-up for Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Publication Awards **Ray Kershaw**

■ Winner of Gastronomy Article of the Year at the Atout France French Tourist Board Travel Publication Awards **Eve Middleton**

■ Winner of Travel Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Article Awards **Judy Armstrong**

■ Winner of Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Article Awards **Judy Armstrong**

■ Runner-up for Magazine Article of the Year at the Abtof Travel Publication Awards **Ray Kershaw**

2012

■ Winner of Best European Destination Travel Feature at the British Guild of Travel Writers Awards **Judy Armstrong**

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FRANCE *at a glance*



HARBOUR SUNSET

The evening sun shines over the Église Notre-Dame Victoire as boats nestle in the harbour of Saint-Raphaël on the Côte d'Azur

PHOTOGRAPH: MICHEL CAVALIER/HEMIS.FR

HITTING THE HEIGHTS

Visitors get a bird's-eye view of the Mediterranean from the *Grande Roue* on the Plage Borély in Marseille

PHOTOGRAPH: BERTRAND GARDEL/HEMIS.FR

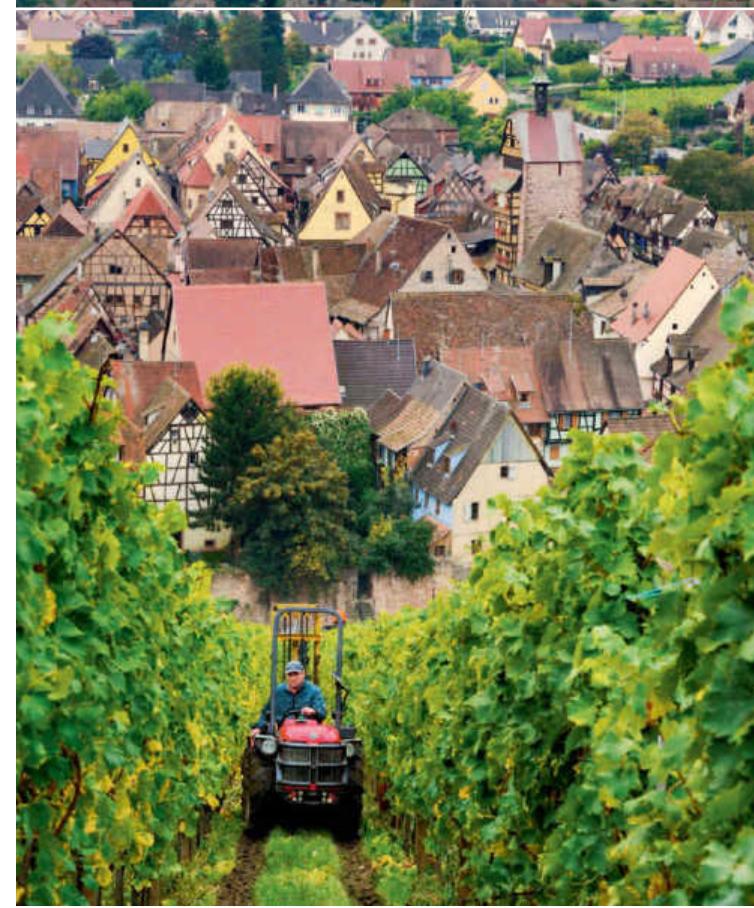




VILLAGE IN THE VINES

A grape harvester climbs up through the vine-clad slopes near the
Plus Beau Village of Riquewihr along the *Route des Vins d'Alsace*

PHOTOGRAPH: BERTRAND RIEGER/HEMIS.FR



WATER AND WINE

The rococo-style Fontaine Amphitrite makes a grand backdrop for
alfresco dining in Place Stanislas in the city of Nancy in Lorraine

PHOTOGRAPH: DREAMSTIME



ALPINE GRAZING

A goatherd guides his livestock through high pastures in the hamlet of Charousse near the Massif du Mont Blanc

PHOTOGRAPH: PIERRE JACQUES/HEMIS.FR



CELEBRATING THE EEL

Members of the Brotherhood of the Eel parade through the fishing village of Gruissan in the Aude département

PHOTOGRAPH: ALAIN FELIX/HEMIS.FR



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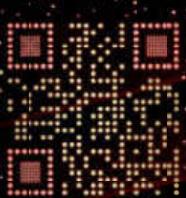


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How to be a Parisian

Paris-based **Stephen Clarke** gives his humorous take on life in the capital

An English friend visited me in Paris recently. A bit of an art fiend, he wanted to explore Montparnasse, where such greats as Matisse, Modigliani, Picasso and Chagall used to hang out. I warned him that he wasn't likely to find cafés full of scruffy, paint-splashed men exchanging priceless drawings for a shot of absinthe, but off he went anyway. We arranged to meet for lunch.

I joined him at one of the famous brasseries on Boulevard Montparnasse. He was surprised by how chic it was, with linen tablecloths, and cotton napkins folded so that they stood up on the tables like attentive geese. I told him that even when the impoverished artists used to frequent them, these places were pretty upmarket. The painters were welcomed because they added some bohemian colour.

We perused the menu and my friend revealed that he had found some early 20th-century art – the murals in the brasserie La Coupole, painted in the late 1920s by some of the area's best-known artists, including Fernand Léger and Moïse Kisling. I had forgotten about them, but it's true – the walls and columns in La Coupole are vibrant celebrations of café life between the wars.

My friend had also found an artist's studio in his guidebook. The Russian-born Cubist sculptor Ossip Zadkine lived and worked near Montparnasse from the late 1920s until his death in 1967. My friend wanted to visit his atelier after lunch.

Talking of lunch: we were frowning at our menus. They were heavy enough to make anyone frown – large, hardbound affairs that weighed on our arms like atlases. The café's main courses were all exorbitantly priced, even if you took the *menu du jour*. Despite the fact that it was a blistering summer day, there only



Stephen Clarke's book *Paris Revealed: The Secret Life of a City* gives an insider's view of the true character of his home city and the people he has shared it with for 20 years.

seemed to be hot dishes on offer. This being a chic brasserie, there were shellfish platters of oysters, shrimps, crab claws and cockles, but I avoid this kind of food in summer, unless I'm sitting right next to the harbour where they were landed.

I hailed one of the waiters, who all had that stiff way of walking that the best-trained French waiters learn at catering school, and let out a cry for help: "Vous n'avez pas de salades?" "Mais bien sûr!" he replied, and returned with two small, rather scruffy paper menus that listed the more downmarket dishes. We found some mixed salads for half the price of the posh main courses; in fact, they were pretty cheap by any Parisian standards. So we ordered two *niçoises*, and my friend even announced that he didn't want anything to drink other than "*une carafe d'eau*" – a jug of free tap water.

As with all truly professional Parisian waiters, our man accepted this as if we had asked for gold-plated oysters and a barrel of champagne. We felt like penniless *artistes* being made to feel at home among the bourgeois. I was tempted to get out a pen and draw a few 'paint splashes' on my shirt.

The salads were generous and excellent, and after two more carafes of water to fortify us against the heat, we headed for the Zadkine museum. It was set in a large courtyard hidden away behind the chic apartment buildings of Rue d'Assas near the Jardin du Luxembourg.

A small house in a walled garden, it was probably shabby in the 1920s. It has now been whitewashed and floorboarded, and Zadkine's Cubist sculptures of entwined couples and monolithic heads are displayed in peaceful, airy rooms that would fetch millions if they came on to the open market. Despite this, the museum is free, so you can wander in at will and get a feel for what it was like to be a Parisian artist between the wars, working in your cramped studio, then emerging on to the boulevards to enjoy a drink among the urban crowds.

Even though Paris is constantly changing, relentlessly being refurbished and gentrified, it still manages to grant you a glimpse of the timeless moods that made it famous. ☺

{ He had that stiff way of walking that the best-trained French waiters learn at catering school }

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With its terracotta-roofed buildings, beautiful beaches and prime location on the Côte d'Azur, the resort of Saint-Tropez is renowned as the glitzy playground of the rich and famous. But for one week at the end of every summer the town plays host to a festival that brings together sea lovers from far and wide.

Les Voiles de Saint-Tropez yachting festival has been taking place in the resort since 1999 and celebrates five centuries of maritime tradition in the town, which began life as a small fishing village before becoming a commercial harbour with shipyards and the luxury yachting hub that it is today.

Stand on the harbour's edge and watch the turquoise waters become awash with a colourful ballet of sails as crews manoeuvre to be first over the line. The *Vieux-Port* abounds in chic cafés at which to sit and soak up the festival atmosphere while admiring the yachts as they disappear into the sunset. The 2015 festival begins on 26 September.

Tel: (Fr) 4 94 97 30 54, www.lesvoiledesaint-tropez.fr ➤



PHOTOGRAPH: ULLSTEIN BILD



What to do in... September

FOCUS ON FILM

The glamorous resort of Deauville in Normandy will welcome a host of film stars to its Festival du Cinéma Américain, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. More than 100 US films, from Hollywood blockbusters to TV shorts, will be shown around the clock from 4-13 September in three venues: the Lucien Barrière Casino (*pictured below*), the Cinéma Morny Club and the International Centre. There are also American-themed events in the Festival Village.

Tel: (Fr) 2 31 14 14 14
www.festival-deauville.com



SHOPPING SPREE

Bag a bargain at the annual flea market in Lille on the weekend of 5-6 September. More than two million visitors descend on the Nord-Pas-de-Calais capital to browse 100 kilometres of stalls run by some 10,000 traders, who are selling everything from antiques to second-hand books.

Tel: (Fr) 8 99 49 01 75
www.braderie-de-lille.fr



GRAPE RACE

More than 10,000 runners are due to take part in the annual marathon (*pictured above*) through the Médoc wine-making region of Bordeaux on 12 September. The 42-kilometre course has 59 vineyard stops, although participants can opt for water if they wish. There are plenty of attractions for spectators including a ten-kilometre winery walk, dancing displays and fireworks. To mark the 31st event, the theme is '*Le Marathon du Médoc se met sur son 31*' ('gets dressed up to the nines') so expect even more elaborate fancy-dress costumes than usual.

Tel: (Fr) 5 56 59 17 20
www.marathonduemedoc.com

PUPPET POWER

Every two years the town of Charleville-Mézières in Champagne-Ardennes holds the ten-day Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes, highlighting the part puppetry plays in the world's cultures. Around 250 troupes of puppeteers – glove, string and shadow – put on shows in theatres and on the streets. This year's event runs from 18-27 September.

Tel: (Fr) 3 24 59 94 94
www.festival-marionnette.com

BOOK NOW, GO LATER...



SKI SOLO IN THE ALPS

Solo skiers heading for the French Alps this winter now have a wider choice. Following the launch of its first solo skiers' chalet in Val-d'Isère (*pictured above*) in May, holiday company Inghams has announced a new location and two additional dates. Skiers can book a single room at Chalet les Dolomites in Val-d'Isère, departing on 12 December, from £599, and a single room at Chalet Chardonnet in Tignes, departing on 5 December, from £649. Prices include seven nights' single occupancy, chalet catering, return flights from London Gatwick to Geneva and resort transfers.

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SOMME JOURNEY

Saga Sapphire is organising a trip to mark the centenary of the Battle of the Somme in 2016. The five-night cruise leaves Dover on 30 June and heads to Boulogne, and passengers will then visit battle sites including the town of Albert, the Boisselle crater and the Thiepval Memorial. On-board events include talks, tea dances and music from the period. The ship also stops at Le Havre, Guernsey and Dunkirk before returning to Dover. Prices start from £940pp, including travel to and from Dover and all meals and entertainment.

Tel: 0800 051 3355
<http://travel.saga.co.uk/cruises>

32

the number of assassination attempts on President Charles de Gaulle.

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Stay in a vineyard during the *vendange* and be part of France's great traditions

Château Cordeillan-Bages, Haut-Médoc

For lovers of Bordeaux *Grands Crus* a stay at the 17th-century Château Cordeillan-Bages (*pictured below*) near Pauillac is an excellent way to truly appreciate these renowned wines. Set in two hectares of vineyards close to the Gironde Estuary, the hotel is a wine-lover's paradise, with brightly decorated rooms laid out in the old wine stores, and a pool, sauna and large *terrasse* for visitors to unwind and channel all their energy into wine tasting. The owners are keen for guests to enjoy an authentic winemaking experience and will take visitors on a tour of their vines, where they have the opportunity to harvest grapes. A wine harvest package, available from 15 September to 15 October, costs from €239pp per night based on two sharing and includes buffet breakfast, a half-bottle of Château Cordeillan-Bages wine in the room, a three-course dinner at the Michelin-two-star restaurant, a wine course on blending Bordeaux wines and a half-day's e-bike rental.

Tel: (Fr) 5 56 59 24 24
www.cordeillanbages.com



Maison d'hôtes La Colombière, Côte-d'Or

In the Burgundy village of Vosne-Romanée lies La Colombière – a former stable and workshop that has been restored by *vigneronne* Anne Gros (*pictured above*) to create a guesthouse for visitors to this famous wine-growing area. Situated next to several vineyards, La Colombière has four tastefully furnished bedrooms, a kitchen and a wine cellar, making it the perfect setting for a wine-tasting break. Anne organises morning and afternoon group visits of her *domaine* on a Tuesday, Thursday and Friday throughout September and October, and teaches visitors how to prune the vines and identify the ripest grapes. Vineyard tours last from 90 minutes to two-and-a-half hours and cost from €100 for a group of up to ten. Prices at La Colombière start from €700 (minimum two nights).

Tel: (Fr) 3 80 61 07 95
www.maison-lacolombiere.com
 ● See page 57 for more about visiting Burgundy's vineyards.

Le Clos Boisé, Languedoc

Anyone seeking a hands-on wine-producing experience will be rewarded at Le Clos Boisé (*pictured below*) in Théziers near Nîmes. The vineyard's owners, who specialise in organic wines, will help guests to cultivate a piece of land, harvest the grapes and make a vintage that is aged, fruity or full-bodied. They can even have their name on the label. Visitors stay in either the guesthouse or a *gîte*, both of which have spacious, well-appointed rooms, and when they're not busy producing wine can relax at the onsite pool and tennis court. A wine harvest holiday costs from €225pp, including a two-night stay, and winemaking and vine cultivation classes. Tel: (Fr) 4 66 03 60 18
www.leclosboise.com



READY TO GO

A Francophile's guide to... Leeds

Find a French connection on your doorstep

The UK's third-biggest city in terms of population, Leeds was the starting point for the 2014 Tour de France and has many other Gallic connections.

Begin by strolling around the ruins of Kirkstall Abbey (tel: 0113 230 5492, www.leeds.gov.uk/museumsandgalleries), set in parkland beside the River Aire, north of the city centre. In the Middle Ages it was home to monks of the Cistercian order, which originated in Burgundy, and many people see French influences in the architecture.

Return to the city centre to admire the Corn Exchange building (<http://leedscornexchange.co.uk>), which dates from the mid-19th century and whose glass-domed roof was inspired by that of the Halle aux Blés, now the Bourse de Commerce in Paris. Next, head to Leeds Art Gallery (tel: 0113 247 8256, www.leeds.gov.uk/museumsandgalleries) in The Headrow, which has works by the sculptor Auguste Rodin, Impressionist Alfred Sisley and Fauvist André Derain.

If all that art has whetted your appetite, stop at Le Chalet (tel: 0113 243 0576, www.le-chalet.co.uk) in Park Row for midday sustenance. This new French-themed tearoom stocks a range of



ABOVE: The Victoria Quarter in Leeds; RIGHT: Kirkstall Abbey

pâtisseries, so savour the indulgent chocolate macarons with a *café au lait*.

While away your afternoon at the Royal Armouries museum (tel: 0113 220 1999, www.royalarmouries.org/leeds), south-east of the city centre, where a free exhibition entitled *Waterloo 1815: The Art of Battle* is being held until 23 August. After that fascinating history lesson, head to the Burgundy Bar and Bistro in Park Place (tel: 0113 245 0703, www.burgundyleeds.com) for an early-evening *apéro*.

Drink up and head to Kendell's French Bistro in

St Peter's Square (tel: 0113 243 6553, www.kendellsbistro.co.uk) for

dinner à la française (mains from £13.90). Dishes include *pavé d'agneau* (roast chump of lamb) and *canard au cassis* (duck with crème de cassis).

Finish your visit at Hyde Park Picture House (tel: 0113 275 2045, www.hydeparkpicturehouse.co.uk). Opened in 1914, this venerable cinema screens a wide variety of French films.

Peter Stewart

For more on the city go to www.visitleeds.co.uk

Read all about it...

One of the most dramatic regions in France is vividly portrayed in the newly updated DK Eyewitness Travel Guide to



Brittany (Dorling Kindersley, £13.99). Featuring excellent photos and maps, this guide provides insights into some

of the most far-flung places in the region and includes a series of recommended itineraries to help visitors make the most of their stay.



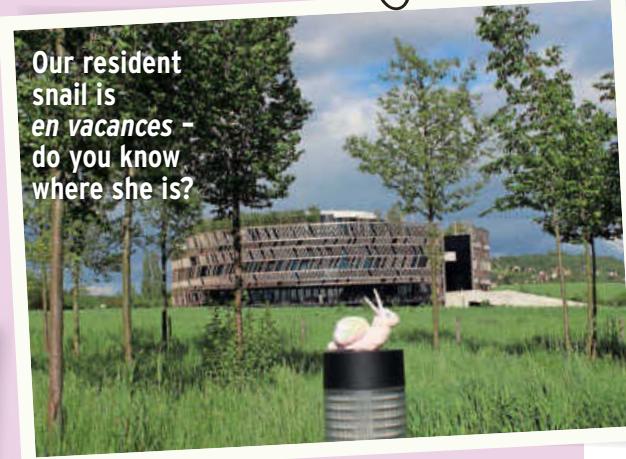
Les aventures de Sergette

Our intrepid new gastropod Sergette is out and about in France. Her adventures this month take her to Burgundy...



LUXURY
HANDMADE
CHOCOLATES

If you know the visitor attraction in Burgundy that Sergette is visiting, send the answer, plus your name and address, to editorial@francemag.com or write us a postcard (address on page 6) and you could win a 15-piece assortment of luxury handmade chocolates that come in an elegant mahogany box (worth a total of £87) courtesy of French chocolatier ZChocolat (www.zchocolat.com). Deadline for entries is 2 September, 2015.



Our resident
snail is
en vacances –
do you know
where she is?

The winner of the July competition is Alison Cobb, from Kettleshulme in Cheshire, who correctly identified the village of Flavigny-sur-Ozerain in Burgundy.



LEGGETT

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE YOU CAN TRUST



Vienne **€18,000**
Ref: I2716 A 3 bedroom village house with shop near Lussac les Chateaux, now for sale less than half price!



Cotes d'Armor **€196,345**
Ref: 54654 Recently reduced 6 bed / 3 bath house with swimming pool on the edge of a bustling village. Ideal B&B.



Sarthe **€295,000**
Ref: P2288EI Traditional character 5 bed farmhouse with outbuildings, 20 acres, 2 wells & pond. Ideal smallholding.

LEGGETT

COTE D'AZUR

COTE D'AZUR
PROPERTIES UNDER
€450,000



Var **€105,000**
Ref: D37P60 Brand new 27m² apartment for sale in a gated residence in Toulon.



Dordogne **€398,000**
Ref: 54695 Impressive 6 bed family home set in its own private grounds - 3.5Ha, swimming pool and great views.



Maine et Loire **€103,550**
Ref: 54257 2 bed / 2 bath longere located a short walk from the busy town of Noyant. Garden, garage & workshop.



Morbihan **€88,000**
Ref: 54735 Opportunity to buy a successful boat hire business in the popular village of La Gacilly on the River Aff.



Alpes Maritimes **€250,000**
Ref: 50658 27m² studio apartment in the heart of Nice, near Place Masséna and the pedestrian area.



Cotes d'Armor **€210,600**
Ref: 34225 5 bed home - conservatory, garage, hot tub, 6010m² of established gardens, quiet location near Loudeac.



Haute Vienne **€424,000**
Ref: 54658 A well established hotel and restaurant business with 15 en-suite bedrooms in historic Solignac.



Eure et Loire **€371,000**
Ref: 54034 17thC townhouse in the historic district of Chartres. 5 bed / 2 bath with many original features.



Var **€339,200**
Ref: 24041 Cute 2 bed cottage close to Callian, facing south with large garden. 30mins to Cannes.



Charente **€88,000**
Ref: 32227 2 bed rural cottage with pretty garden located on the edge of a village with river walks and restaurants.



Loire Atlantique **€890,000**
Ref: 54172 Modern 4 bedroom house with heated pool close to Europe's longest beach and La Baule golf course.



Pyrenees Orientales **€114,450**
Ref: 50689 Secure 1 bed / 1 bath apartment with parking space and swimming pools. Close to Perpignan.



Var **€420,000**
Ref: 49356 Provencal village villa 4 bed / 2 bath, kitchen, large lounge, pool with terrace and garage.

www.leggettfrance.com

info@leggettfrance.com Freephone: 08 08 10 10 940 or 0033(0)5 53 60 84 88

Head Office: Leggett Immobilier, La Maison du Chapitre, Route de Riberac 24340 La Rochebeaucourt France All prices include agency fees.

For all Cotes d'Azur property enquiries please contact info@leggettfrance.fr

Quick guide to... Dinard

I've heard the name, but where exactly is Dinard?

The town of Dinard is on Brittany's Côte d'Émeraude, across the mouth of the Rance estuary from the ferry port of Saint-Malo. With its sandy beaches and coastal walks, Dinard has become a popular resort with families.

Does the town have much of a history?

Why yes! Dinard was a small fishing village before being settled by shipping merchants from Saint-Malo. Then, in the late 19th century, wealthy American and British visitors made it a fashionable summer resort and built many stunning belle-époque villas along the coast. However, the resort declined a little between the two world wars when the rich and famous discovered the Côte d'Azur.

Has it been a celebrity haunt over the years?

Yes. Once deemed the 'Cannes of the North', Dinard has welcomed

a number of famous figures. Picasso painted here in the 1920s, Sir Winston Churchill enjoyed a number of holidays in the area and, more recently, actress Joan Collins is said to have become a regular visitor.

It sounds great. So what is there for visitors?

One of the town's main attractions is its swish belle-époque casino (tel: (Fr) 2 99 16 30 38, www.lucienbarriere.com/fr). It looks over the Plage de l'Écluse, Dinard's biggest beach (*main picture*), which is filled with rows of striped tents during the summer. Look out for a sculpture of film director Alfred Hitchcock who, it is claimed, based the house in the thriller *Psycho* on a villa in Dinard. Another of the town's beaches is Plage de Saint-Énogat, a haven for water-sports enthusiasts. A short walk along the coastal path will bring you to the village of Saint-Lunaire, which is

popular with Parisians and French film stars. Continuing with the screen theme, a British Film Festival is held in Dinard every autumn (30 September to 4 October in 2015) and often has previews of new releases.

Where should I stay?

Splash out on a room at the majestic Grand Hôtel Barrière de Dinard (*pictured above*, tel: (Fr) 2 99 88 26 26, www.dinardgrandhotel.com), which has overlooked the Bay of Saint-Malo since 1859. The sumptuous interiors, gourmet restaurant and spa are a triple treat. Doubles from €180.

How do I get there?

Dinard-Pleurtuit-Saint-Malo Airport is just six kilometres south-west of the centre of Dinard and is served by Ryanair from London Stansted. Return flights from £49.99.

Peter Stewart

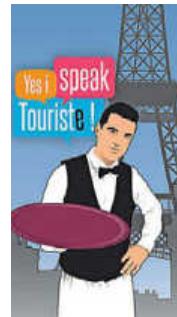
For more information visit www.dinard-tourisme.com



TRAVEL NEWS

APP-Y TRAVELS

Anyone who has ever struggled to cope with a fast-talking Parisian can now get help through a free app produced by the city's tourist board and chamber of commerce. Named Yes I Speak Touriste, the new app provides an interactive map of Paris pinpointing shops, hotels, museums, restaurants and services such as car hire that have someone who speaks your language. The app is available in English and eight other languages, and can be downloaded from Google Play and the App Store.



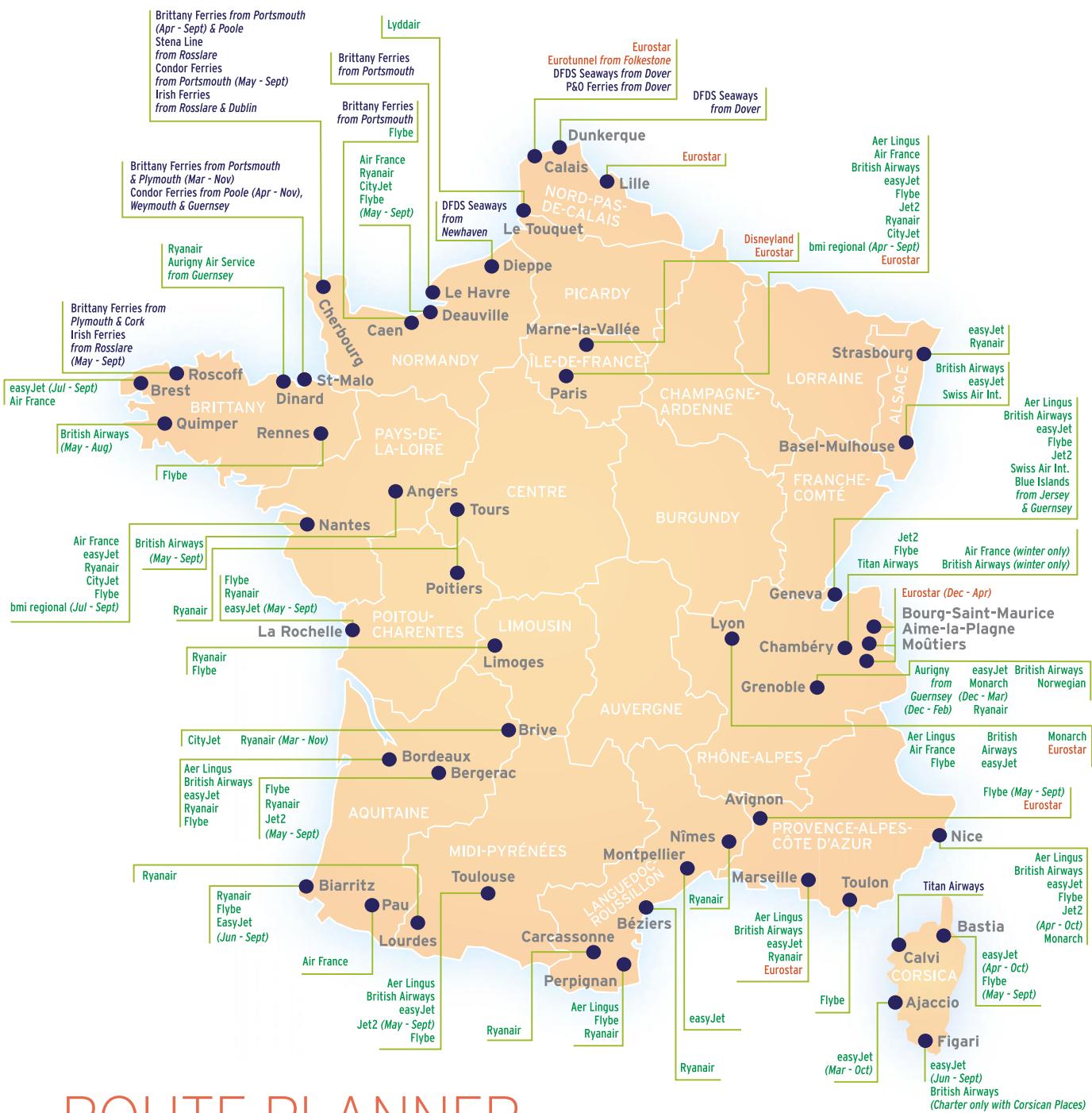
LYON LINK

Budget airline easyJet is launching flights to Lyon, France's foodie capital, from two more UK airports. Weekly services will begin from London Southend and Belfast from 12 December. Prices from £49.99 return. www.easyjet.com.

DIRECT TO THE ALPS

Tickets are on sale for the direct winter Eurostar service from London St Pancras to Moûtiers, Aime-la-Plagne and Bourg-Saint-Maurice in the French Alps. The trains give skiers quick access to some of France's best resorts including Meribel, Val-d'Isère, Courchevel, Tignes and La Plagne. The Saturday day train starts on 19 December and the Friday night train on 1 January, and the service continues until 9 April, 2016. Prices start from £149 return including transport of ski or snowboard equipment. www.eurostar.com





ROUTE PLANNER

Plan your journey to France with our handy map and directory

FERRIES

Brittany Ferries
Tel: 0871 244 1400
www.brittanyferries.co.uk

Condor Ferries
Tel: 0845 609 1024
www.condorferries.co.uk

DFDS Seaways
Tel: 0871 574 7235
www.dfdsseaways.co.uk

Irish Ferries
Tel: (ROI) 818 300 400
www.irishferries.com

P&O Ferries

Tel: 0871 664 2121
www.poferries.com

Stena Line
Tel: (ROI) 1 204 7777
www.stenaline.ie

RAIL

Eurostar
Tel: 0843 218 6186
www.eurostar.com

Eurotunnel
Tel: 0844 335 3535
www.eurotunnel.com

Voyages-sncf.com

Tel: 0844 848 5848
www.voyages-sncf.com

AIRLINES

Aer Lingus
Tel: 0871 718 2020
www.aerlingus.com

Air France
Tel: 0871 663 3777
www.airfrance.co.uk

Aurigny Air Services
Tel: 01481 822 886
www.aurigny.com

Blue Islands

Tel: 0845 620 2122
www.blueislands.com

bmi regional
Tel: 0330 333 7998
www.bmirégional.com

British Airways
Tel: 0844 493 0787
www.britishairways.com

CityJet
Tel: 0871 405 2020
www.cityjet.com

easyJet

Tel: 0330 365 5000
www.easyjet.com

Flybe
Tel: 0371 700 2000
www.flybe.com

Jet2
Tel: 0800 408 1350
www.jet2.com

Lyddair
Tel: 01797 322 207
www.lyddair.com

Monarch
Tel: 0871 940 5040
www.monarch.co.uk

Norwegian

Tel: 0843 378 0888
www.norwegian.com

Ryanair
Tel: 0871 246 0000
www.ryanair.com

Swiss Int. Air
Tel: 0845 601 0956
www.swiss.com

Titan Airways
Tel: 01279 680 616
www.titan-airways.co.uk

This month we ask a reader, a professional and a *FRANCE* contributor about their love of France

A reader...



Linda Garrett
Leominster,
Herefordshire

A professional...



Bryan Houde
Freelance translator,
London

A contributor...



Daniel Elkan
London

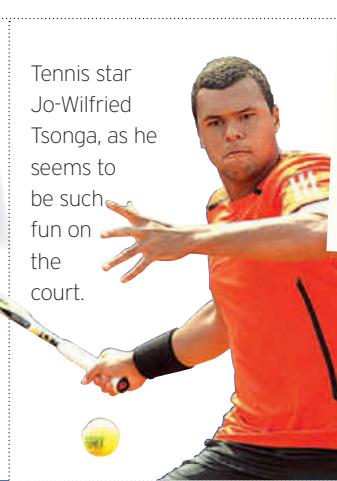
Travellers' tales

1 What was your last travel experience in France?



My husband Ken and I hired a lovely *gîte* in the Charente last summer and visited Aubeterre-sur-Dronne (pictured), which has a stunning monolithic church.

2 Who would be your perfect French dinner guest?



Tennis star Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, as he seems to be such fun on the court.

3 What is your best insider tip on France?



Visitors should remember that the 50km/h (31mph) speed limit starts at the sign for the town or village; specific speed limit signs are few and far between.

I travelled with a friend to sunny Montpellier where we enjoyed lunch at a classic French bistro before visiting the public gardens and open squares, and walking along the small, winding streets lined with shops.



I am fascinated by court life at Versailles in the 18th century and would invite Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette to tell me about the American Revolution and the onset of the French Revolution.



Michel Platini, president of Uefa [Union of European Football Associations]. I'd love to discuss football with him and hear about what really goes on at Fifa, the sport's world governing body.

I visited the Alpine ski resort of Les Contamines in the February half-term, when it was quite extraordinary to be snowboarding on surprisingly quiet slopes.



If you're looking for the best wines at the best prices, buy from independent winemakers directly at the winery. Most will have a tasting room and be happy to answer questions.



If you are travelling to the Alps by train and staying the night in Paris, try one of the many inexpensive, comfortable hotels near the Gare de Lyon. Twenty-five of us did this in January, and it worked well.



Are you going to France again soon? Tell us your plans at editorial@francemag.com

Late summer in... Reims

With the end of the busy school holiday period and the start of the wine harvest, September is a great time to visit the city at the heart of the Champagne region.

FRANCE Magazine highlights some of its major attractions

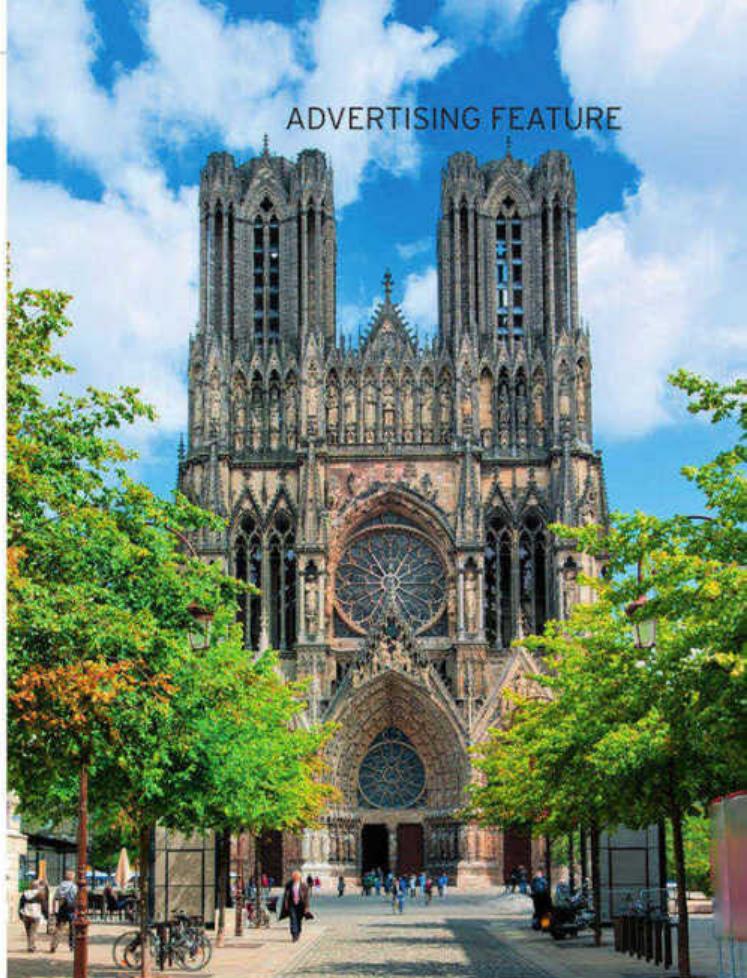
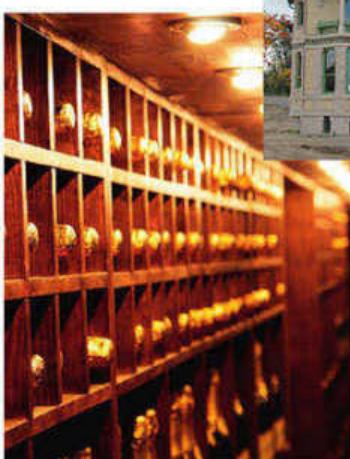
If you love the art-deco style, Reims is the place to base your autumn getaway. The city suffered so much destruction during World War I that by 1918 only about 20 per cent of the buildings remained standing. This led to an intensive period of reconstruction in the 1920s in the most modern architecture of the time. The influences of that decade are everywhere, so it pays to look up, above today's businesses, to find the beautiful mosaics, relief stonework and decorative ironwork.

From the tourist office in Rue Guillaume de Machault you can take an hour's open-top bus tour (€10, daily) to get your bearings and learn about the city's history before you strike out on your own. Alternatively, a two-hour bus tour with an expert guide (€29, Fridays and Saturdays only) traces the history of the champagne houses during World War I, when their ancient cellars became an underground world of schools and hospitals, traces of which still remain.

September is the height of the grape harvest season in the 15,000 vineyards around Reims that help to produce the world-renowned bubbly. Some vineyard owners make champagne under their own label – and a visit to a small producer can



ABOVE: The restored Villa Demoiselle; LEFT: A cellar of Reims's most famous export; TOP: The Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Reims



ADVERTISING FEATURE

be fascinating – while others sell their grapes to the large champagne houses in and around the city. Close to the centre of Reims are household names including Taittinger, G. H. Mumm and Lanson, which offer tours and tastings on most days.

To mix the hedonistic pleasures of good food and wine with a dash of culture, the 13th-century Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Reims should not be missed. Many French kings were crowned here, and the building has a range of treasures spanning the lifetime of the building, including stained-glass windows designed by the artist Marc Chagall and installed in 1974. A climb to the top of one of the towers gets you close to the massive medieval statuary and provides a fabulous view of the city. Nearby, the Palais du Tau, the ancestral home of the Archbishops of Reims, holds priceless exhibits including magnificent 16th-century tapestries.

On a slightly smaller scale, the Villa Demoiselle in Boulevard Henry Vasnier, opposite the Champagne Pommery cellars, is a gem of a restored private house that blends art-nouveau and art-deco styles. The boulevard is named after a wine merchant and art collector who commissioned the house as a showpiece in the early 1900s. By 1970 it was derelict, with rumours of a hidden treasure leading to much destruction of the internal walls and floors. The villa was restored to its former glory and opened to the public in 2008 and is a beautiful way to round off your visit to the heart of Champagne country.

For more information on where to stay and what to visit, see www.reims-tourism.com

Eurotunnel Le Shuttle is the quickest way to the continent by car. Book early and get the best fares to explore Reims. Visit www.eurotunnel.com or call 0870 850 8133 to book your crossing.

**EURO
TUNNEL** le shuttle



1



3



2



4



Drivers heading down through western France have several options once they reach Nantes. The *autoroute* to Bordeaux is fast (3hr 30min) but uneventful and the inland route via Poitiers and Angoulême can seem complicated. By far the most charismatic option is the coastal route, but it is also the slowest. Allow an extra two days' travel and you will have an entertaining drive with many reasons for stopping.

Road TRIP

Give the *autoroute* a miss on your drive south and take the scenic route along the Atlantic coast between Nantes and Bordeaux

DAY ONE

Once you have crossed the high, arching bridge over the River Loire to the west of Nantes ignore the signs for Bordeaux and pick up those for Nantes Airport and the Île de Noirmoutier. Follow the D723 and the Loire towards its mouth. In the distance another impressive bridge crosses the estuary at Saint-Nazaire and the sight of the oil refinery at Donges is surprisingly thrilling.

First stop is Paimboeuf, a pleasant port that no longer sees much traffic but retains many echoes of its seafaring past. Information boards on the old quays give a flavour. Have a spot of lunch at the Crêperie l'Estuaire (tel: (Fr) 2 44 06 20 42, www.restaurantcreperiel'estuaire.fr), a wooden shack in a pleasant spot under the pine trees.

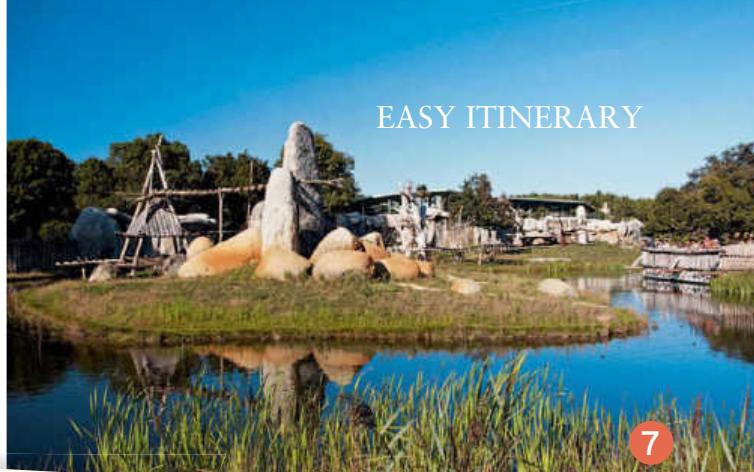
Continue on the D77 and at the junction with the bridge to Saint-Nazaire turn south to follow the coastal road through Saint-Brevin-les-Pins – a day-tripper resort with a promenade and a handful of eateries. Saint-Brevin-l'Océan is more lively, but the sandy beach and the sea lie beyond the dunes.

Just beyond Saint-Brevin-l'Océan take the D96 to Préfailles ①. Visit the Grand Bazar, a belle-époque shop selling kites and buckets, and then walk along the coastal footpath to the lighthouse at Pointe Saint-Gildas for an encounter with the crashing Atlantic waves. A stop in the traditional fishing port and seaside town of Pornic just along the coast will lead to La Fraiseraie (tel: (Fr) 2 40 82 08 21, www.lafraiseraie.com) – a veritable temple to ice cream and strawberries.

PHOTOGRAPHS: FOTOLIA; FRANCIS LEROY/HEMIS/F. PERROUX



5



7



6

Continuing south follow the D13 to Bourgneuf-en-Retz and then take the D758. If the tides are with you it is possible to turn on to the D948 at Beauvoir-sur-Mer and cross the causeway (a frequent feature of the Tour de France) to the Île de Noirmoutier **2**. If it's high tide continue to Fromentine and use the bridge. A good base for an evening of exploration is the Maison sur l'Eau in Barbâtre (doubles from €159, tel: (Fr) 2 28 10 34 40, www.maisonsurleau.com), a comfortable clapboard hotel with a swimming pool.

DAY TWO

On regaining the mainland at Fromentine turn right and follow the D38 south along the Vendée coast. Leave the D38 and follow signs for Les Plages to get closer to the sea at Saint-Jean-de-Monts, and again at Saint-Gilles-Croix-de-Vie. Resorts now merge with each other and to make quicker progress return to the D38 as it suits you.

The D38 and then the D32 lead to Les Sables-d'Olonne **3**, a resort often overlooked in favour of La Rochelle and the Île de Ré. Now, however, is the ideal time to get out for a walk along the seafront to the Île Penotte. Despite the

name, this is not an island but rather a warren of narrow streets and fishing cottages decorated with seashells (tel: (Fr) 2 51 96 85 85, www.lessablesdolonne-tourisme.com).

Les Sables is also the starting point for the Vendée Globe round-the-world yacht race, which is held every four years (the next is in 2016), and the marina is often full of the finest ocean-going yachts.

Head inland on the D949 to Luçon and then south again on the D137 through the Marais Poitevin **4**. This wetland criss-crossed by a network of canals is often referred to as *Venise Verte*. Eventually you come to Marans, a four-star *ville fleurie* connected to the sea and La Rochelle by canal. Despite its inland location the town is a bustling marina and a convenient lunch stop. Right by the River Sèvre Niortaise is the bright red Thé et Tartine (menus from €16, tel: (Fr) 5 46 66 06 23), a restaurant known for its oysters and home-made ice cream in 18 flavours.

La Rochelle **5** is reached by following the D137 and the N11 *autoroute*. Check in at the Résidence de France (doubles from €110, tel: (Fr) 5 46 28 06 00, www.hotel-larochelle.com), a five-star hotel at the heart of the arcaded old town.

Dine at the Quatre Sergents (menus from €26, tel: (Fr) 5 46 41 35 80, www.les4sergents.com). Housed within a plant-filled, double-height winter garden, the restaurant is the most atmospheric table in town.

DAY THREE

After walking around the old port and having a coffee at the Café de la Paix **6**, La Rochelle's landmark belle-époque café (tel: (Fr) 5 46 41 39 79), take the D137 dual-carriageway to Rochefort. When the *Hermione*, the replica of an 18th-century frigate built to assist the rebels in the American War of Independence, returns from the USA at the end of August, she will be moored in Rochefort and open for visits (tel: (Fr) 5 46 82 07 07, www.hermione.com. *Feature coming soon*).

Having left the D137 for the D733, continue to Saint-Agnant and take the D123 to Marennes. Then go towards the Île d'Oléron on the D26 and turn left on to the D728E for La Tremblade. Follow the D25 along the Côte Sauvage through the Forêt de la Coubre and you will reach the Zoo de la Palmyre **7**. France's leading conservation zoo covers 18 hectares of forest, and houses animals including tigers, polar bears and rhinos (tel: (Fr) 5 46 22 46 06, www.zoo-palmyre.fr).

The final objective is to follow the Gironde Estuary along the D145, the D146 and the D255 via Royan and Mortagne-sur-Gironde to reach Blaye. Head for junction 40 of the A10 just to the north of Bordeaux, from where you can continue your journey south. **2**

Paul Lamarra

Enjoy this article? Tell us where you'd like your road trip to be and we'll plan it out in a future edition. Email editorial@francemag.com

ACTUALITÉS

Keep up to date with
all the latest news
from France



MAIN PICTURE: Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo at the 'year-to-go' ceremony in the capital; BELOW: The new Stade de Bordeaux, which cost €183 million

Backing for the Euros

Europe's biggest footballing tournament returns to France next year and a host of exciting stadia will welcome fans, says **Paul Lamarra**

The new football season has kicked off, but fans are already looking forward to the Uefa European championships being held in France next summer.

It is the biggest sporting event in France since the World Cup finals in 1998 and will be seen as an important test in the nation's bid to host the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The competition will be staged in nine French cities and involve ten stadia, with an unprecedented 24 teams taking part in more than 50 matches. Bordeaux, Lille, Lyon and Nice have all built new stadia while the Parc des Princes in Paris and the stadia in Lens, Marseille, Saint-Etienne and Toulouse have been substantially refurbished.

At the new Stade des Lumières in Lyon, fans will be given an opportunity to sample the city's renowned cuisine at a brasserie operated by Paul Bocuse,

the three-star Michelin chef who has several restaurants in the city.

In football-mad Lens, in the north of France, the refurbished Stade Bollaert-Delelis, next to the Louvre-Lens museum, continues the regeneration of the former coalfields. The stadium will hold 38,000 fans – 6,000 more than the number of Lens inhabitants.

The futuristic Nouveau Stade de Bordeaux, where the roof and terracing are supported by nearly 1,000 white poles, has been praised for its design. The new stadium, which will host five matches, cost €183 million to build.

Paris will be the focus of the tournament with the opening match and final being played at the 81,000-capacity Stade de France in Saint-Denis, on the

northern fringes of the capital.

The stadium was built specially to host the 1998 World Cup final.

"Football will be everywhere," said Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo at the 'year-to-go' event. "We have a lot of enthusiasm and energy – Paris always needs to reveal herself and to vibrate in unison with the rest of the world through great events such as this," she added.

Also announced at the event was the 120,000-capacity fan zone on the Champ de Mars next to the Eiffel Tower. Every match will be shown on a giant screen and it is here that popular French DJ David Guetta will launch Euro 2016 with a free concert on 9 June.

Fans are being encouraged to explore the city on a newly devised Paris Foot Tour linking the Champ de Mars, the banks of the River Seine, the Parc des Princes on the edge of the Bois de Boulogne and the Stade de France.



The route will be lined with sporting, cultural and artistic activities.

In the run-up to the championships, footballers aged from 16 to 18 will take part in a tournament where the winning team will play a match at the 20,000-seater Stade Jean-Bouin. Their opponents will be made up of players from the French national sides that won the World Cup in 1998 and the Uefa championships in 2000.

Attending the 'year-to-go' event alongside Hidalgo was Frank Leboeuf, a member of both winning teams. "These young lads weren't born or don't have any memories of what happened in the summer of '98," said the former Chelsea player. "There's a new generation and it's our mission to show them that France is a winning country which knows how to organise such events."

One million tickets have already been offered to fans in a lottery and 20,000 tickets will be offered free to children from deprived backgrounds. Tickets for the early group stage matches start from just €25 while top tickets for the final on 10 July cost an eye-watering €895.

At the moment only French supporters know where their side will be playing in the opening stages; fans from other countries will have to wait for the tournament draw on 12 December.

Mayor pledges cleaner Seine

The River Seine will be cleaned up as part of Paris's bid to host the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, says the city's mayor, Anne Hidalgo.

She hopes the Seine will be in good enough condition for the Olympic triathlon's 1,500-metre swimming section to be held on the river at the steps to the city hall. It could also lead the authorities to lift the ban on swimming in the Seine imposed in 1923. Currently, anyone taking a dip faces a €15 fine.

Sceptical Parisians, however, remember that Jacques Chirac, when he was mayor, made a similar pledge in 1988, insisting that the Seine would be safe enough for swimmers within five years.

C'est qui?

Every month we cast a spotlight on a figure making headlines

Name: Bernard Tapie.

Occupation: Business tycoon.

Tell me more: Bernard Tapie, perhaps the most controversial living Frenchman, has launched a fresh legal attempt through the civil courts to recoup €1 billion from the French government over the sale of sportswear firm Adidas.

Tapie rescued the company from bankruptcy in the late 1980s, but claims he lost out after the Crédit Lyonnais bank, then publicly owned, undervalued his stake when Adidas was sold off in 1993. The French courts awarded him €403 million in 2008, but that decision was soon overturned.

The Adidas saga has put the 72-year-old Tapie back in the headlines, but he is no stranger to the media spotlight. Business success landed him the role of minister for city affairs in President François Mitterrand's government in the early 1990s and further plaudits came his way when he took over as chairman of Olympique de Marseille football club and founded La Vie Claire Tour de France team.

With his financial backing the football club entered its most successful phase, becoming Uefa Champions League winners in 1993,



and the cycling team is the last team to have provided a French champion. It was not long, however, before the success story turned sour. When evidence of bribery and fraud surfaced at Olympique de Marseille, Tapie was banned from public office, served eight months in prison and was eventually declared bankrupt.

Undeterred by these setbacks, Tapie has starred in a Claude Lelouch film, released a single with rapper Doc Gynéco and is now the hero of his own *bande dessinée* (comic strip). Such resilience means it is unlikely he will ever give up his legal struggle with the French government.

NEWS IN BRIEF

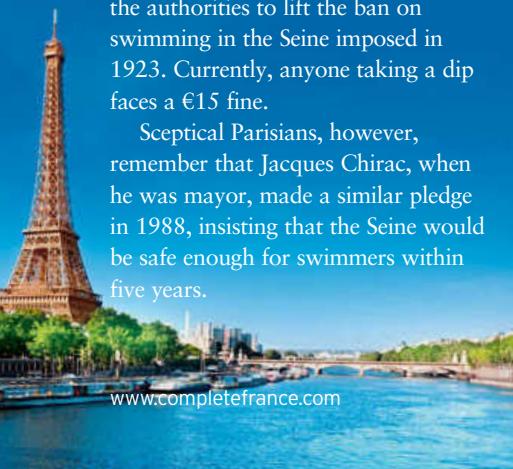
- Billboards advertising services such as hotels and restaurants have been banned on the approaches to towns and villages with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants. The newly implemented law seeks to control visual pollution and ends an exemption for

advertising billboards that are deemed to be 'useful to travellers', after supermarkets were found to be getting around the rules.

- Cyclists in Paris can now go through red lights to turn right or go straight ahead at certain junctions after a trial indicated that it did not increase accidents. Cyclists will get their

own signs, which will be placed beneath the normal traffic lights.

- The space-age Goûter mountain refuge (altitude 3,800 metres), which is popular with climbers heading for the summit of Mont Blanc, has been closed until further notice after a hot spell increased the likelihood of avalanches and landslides. ➤



La grande question

Every month we explain the background to a top news story



Can France retain her prominent position on the world stage?

Recent successes in helping to settle the Greek crisis and in negotiating a nuclear deal with Iran have provided a fillip for

President François Hollande (pictured with German Chancellor Angela Merkel) and his government.

Far from being marginalised by Germany in the Greek talks, France has been widely credited with ending the threat of a European Union Grexit. And although Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has taken a tough line with Iran, he has been instrumental in securing an agreement with Tehran on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Of course, not everyone sees it that way and several commentators and presidential hopefuls have sounded the alarm over the country's diminishing influence.

François Fillon, a prime minister during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency, wrote in an open letter to President Hollande that it was France not Greece that was the economic sick man of Europe and that France was "slipping out of history and losing mastery of its destiny".

When Éric Zemmour, a columnist with the *Le Figaro* magazine, penned his book *Le Suicide Français* it sold 5,000 copies a day. His thesis is that since 1970 France has gradually lost its virility. The response to this increasingly fashionable viewpoint has been for Prime Minister Manuel Valls to declare war on the "discourse of demise" and to publish his own extended polemics.

UK drivers face speeding crackdown in France

British drivers in France who are flashed by road safety cameras for speeding or going through a red light will be traced and fined under rules being imposed from 2017. The warning comes as figures obtained by The Local.fr news network show that 165,000 drivers from the UK were caught on camera in France last year.

At the moment UK drivers avoid fines (unless stopped by police) because lack of information-sharing between UK and French authorities means car owners are difficult to trace. The UK has now signed up to a directive giving police in other EU countries access to DVLA records.

Last year, foreign drivers accounted for at least 3.5 million traffic offences captured on camera in France. The Belgians, who can be traced and fined already, were the worst culprits with 420,000 incidents.



New Nantes airport cleared for take-off

Prime Minister Manuel Valls has announced that the construction of the new Nantes airport can start early next year after 17 objections

were dismissed by an administrative court. Work on the Aéroport du Grand-Ouest was due to begin in 2012 but environmental protesters occupied the site near the village of Notre-Dame-des-Landes. They claimed that the new complex would destroy valuable wetlands and that the capacity of the existing airport nearer the city could be expanded.

The protests have led to clashes with police, who used tear gas and water cannon to disperse the crowd during a demonstration in Nantes (pictured).

Valls said that anyone still occupying the airport site would be removed and the area secured.

Tobacconists in plain pack protest

Tobacconists in France have covered speed cameras with black plastic bags in a protest over a planned law that will require cigarettes to be sold in plain packaging from next May.

Activists hoped to put a dent in the state's revenue from motoring fines. Union leaders insist that the Bill, if passed, would threaten the jobs of 100,000 staff in 26,000 tobacconists' without reducing smoking levels.

Advocates of the new law estimate that it will cut the number of smokers by ten per cent in the first five years.

Wine regions win Unesco status

The regions of Burgundy and Champagne are both celebrating their new inscriptions to Unesco's list of World Heritage sites. For Champagne, it is the Hillsides, Houses and Wine Cellars that have been recognised, which includes small producers to world-famous champagne houses. In Burgundy, it is the 'climats' that have been recognised; this phrase refers to the region's patchwork of defined plots of vines, their particular *terroir*, their grapes and the knowledge of the winemakers.

THE FUNNY SIDE OF LIFE IN FRANCE



by
PERRY TAYLOR

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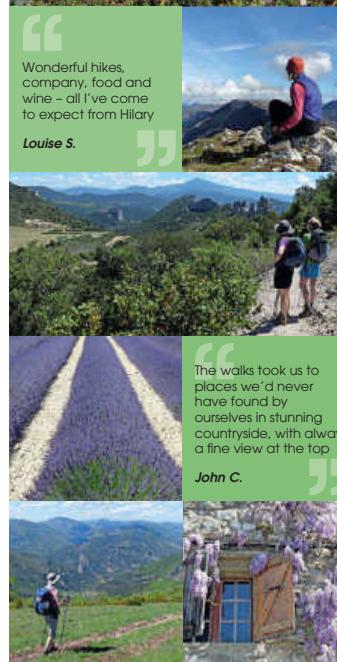
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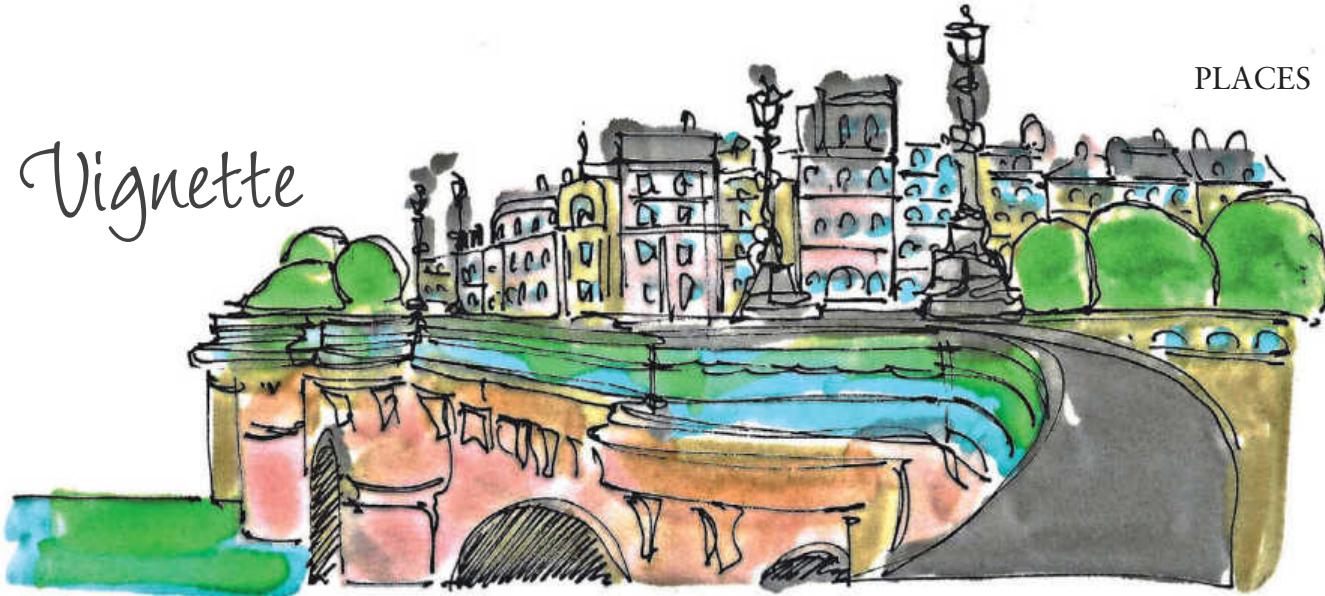
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Vignette



Noirmoutier-en-l'Île market

Author **Joanne Harris** recalls childhood summers spent on an island in the Vendée

My favourite French market has been in existence for at least 80 years, which is when my grandfather, Georges Payen, decided to buy a holiday home on the island of Noirmoutier. Since then, every year, my family have spent holidays on the island. I spent six weeks there every summer throughout the whole of my childhood, and one of my fondest memories is of the Sunday market on Place de la République, in Noirmoutier-en-l'Île. My mother would leave me standing outside the cool, glass-covered fish market, with its lobsters and oysters and cuttlefish and great displays of sea-bass and red mullet, and tell me to wait there quietly and make sure I behaved myself.

Outside the fish market, there were stalls selling every kind of produce. There was an aisle of fruit stalls, with white and yellow peaches, nectarines, melons and strawberries; and vegetable stands that sold lettuces as big

as pillows and great bouquets of fresh herbs. There were stands selling fresh goats' cheeses rolled in grey ash; and sausage stands selling log strings of donkey or wild-boar salami.

An old man sold honey from a glass-fronted box that allowed you to look straight into the honeycomb and see the bees at work. There was an old lady selling loaves from out of the back of a battered blue van, and who used to give me pieces of *madeleine* from the basket at her side.

I soon learnt that these tradesfolk gave out samples of merchandise and that, if I hung around there, I could collect enough to make a very passable breakfast: slices of orange *melon nantais* or cubes of hot-pink



Best-selling author Joanne Harris has set several of her novels in France including *Chocolat*, *The Lollipop Shoes* and *Peaches for Monsieur Le Curé*. Her latest book, *The Gospel of Loki*, (Gollancz, £8.99 paperback), is a reworking of the Norse myths.

watermelon, chunks of brioche or gruyère cheese, pieces of nectarine, salami slices, crusts of newly baked rustic bread.

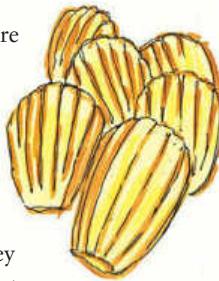
The traders soon discovered that the presence of a little girl eating a slice of melon, for instance, could make all the difference, especially when trying to attract elderly female customers, and they would make every effort to persuade me to stand by their stall rather than a rival's. Even at an early age, I was open to bribery. I got to know them all, and their customers, too. There was Madame Fourrage, who wore a *quichenotte*, the island's traditional head-dress, and who always bought the same things: a loaf of bread, a bottle of red wine, olives from the stall which sold a bewildering number of types shining like polished gemstones, and a goat's cheese wrapped in leaves. There was Adrien, who never went anywhere without his ancient, shaggy dog, and whose island accent was so strong that I rarely understood what he was saying.

Then there was the lady who made *galettes* on a hot plate by the roadside, where my mother would always stop after she had bought the fish, and who never, ever commented (as I ate my crispy *galette*, just-the-right-side of burnt at the edges and filled with spicy merguez sausage) on the two or three breakfasts I'd already made with the help of my friends at the market stalls.

Nearly 50 years later, the Sunday market has barely changed. It has expanded to include a great many clothes stalls, souvenirs, jewellery and bric-a-brac – and even a carousel roundabout, with a double row of leaping horses, much loved by my daughter – but the essential heart of it is still there, clustered around the fish market; the fruit stalls and the flower

stalls and the old men selling Gros-Plant wines and the old ladies selling *madeleines*. And they still give out samples – for the price of a smile.

Just remember to bring an appetite. ☺





READER PHOTO COMPETITION

The winner of this month's competition is Xavier Birkui, from Argenteuil, near Paris, with his image of a modern apartment block in Dunkerque in the Nord *département*.

Send us your holiday picture capturing the essence of France – either to our online reader gallery or by email – and we'll publish the best image in next month's *FRANCE Magazine*. The winner will receive two great prizes: a panoramic pod for taking 360° landscape shots on their smartphone (£15.99 from www.iwantoneofthose.com) and £50 of credit from photo personalisation specialist Photobox (www.photobox.co.uk). To enter the October competition, send your high-resolution image to editorial@francemag.com or upload it to *FRANCE Magazine's* Flickr page, www.flickr.com/groups/france_magazine by 17 August. See the Flickr page for terms and conditions.



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Please supply your name and address.

STAR LETTER

J **S**
Being jazz fans and having experienced concerts in many splendid locations over the years, we were intrigued during a recent visit to France to see leaflets for the free Chinon Jazz Festival on 6-7 June.

Concerts were held in several locations in the beautiful Indre-et-Loire town and ranged from small combos to a Balkan big band playing in the castle grounds.

The highlight came on the Sunday evening when the Dumoulington Orchestra played on the Île de Tours. My wife Pam and I had walked there earlier in the week and had found no suggestion of anything approaching a suitable venue for a concert. It was basically a large overgrown islet in the River Varenne with allotments cut into part of it.

Undeterred, we ventured forth for the start at 6pm and were surprised to find that an area between the trees had been cleared and that chairs, benches, music stands and sound equipment had been conjured up.

A half-barrel full of ice was the cooler for the beer and the other half made



a bar for the wine boxes. A decent crowd arrived and the concert got under way to what proved to be a very appreciative audience. We were probably the only British visitors in attendance but we were made most welcome. *Vive la France!*

Ian Bardell
Bridgwater, Somerset



Richard Golen

There's nothing like sitting in one of the waterside cafés in Cassis and watching the world go by... I love this place.



@JaneHards

Languedoc-Roussillon is such a beautiful part of the world... oh how I love France!

Cycling memories

We loved Paul Lamarra's feature on cycling from Nantes to Hennebont (*FRANCE Magazine*, August 2015, issue 203). Every summer for 22 years we cycled the latter part of that route – the Blavet Valley. The little towns such as Baud and Guénin, the pretty villages such as Saint-Nicolas-des-Eaux, where Paul ate, the wonderful medieval churches and the many *fest-noz* music and dance events gave us wonderful experiences which we were lucky enough to pass on to our children and grandchildren.

Eric and Joan Houlder
Pontefract, West Yorkshire

Hitting the road

Your *Road Trip* feature makes very interesting reading, in particular the Reims to Langres article (*FRANCE Magazine*, August 2015, issue 203). My family and I made this journey years ago, before the *autoroutes* were complete.

We have enjoyed many successful holidays, mainly in the Vaucluse and Var *départements* in Provence. We have just returned from a fortnight in Lagnes, near l'Isle-sur-la-Sorgue, an area that we now know very well.

Say bonjour to...

Experience French Toastmasters Club, London

Founded by modern languages teacher Raphael Kopel in 2013, Experience French Toastmasters Club forms part of Toastmasters International, which helps its 290,000 members improve their communication skills through public speaking.

The club is the first French Toastmasters group in the UK and aims to promote both the culture and language of France. Members meet twice a month at the City Temple Conference Centre in central London. They come prepared with speeches on specific French cultural topics and also take part in impromptu question and answer sessions. Both are then evaluated by the rest of the group.

Members hail from many countries, but everyone has a link with France, whether through friends or family living there or through business and holidays. In addition to the public-speaking meetings, the club organises social events every month, including film nights, French-themed dinners, and theatre and art gallery visits.

This summer the club entered public-speaking competitions in France for the first time. It is always on the look-out for new members and welcomes French speakers of all abilities. www.experience-french.org

Do you belong to a group with French connections? Tell us about it by emailing editorial@francemag.com or write to the address on the facing page.



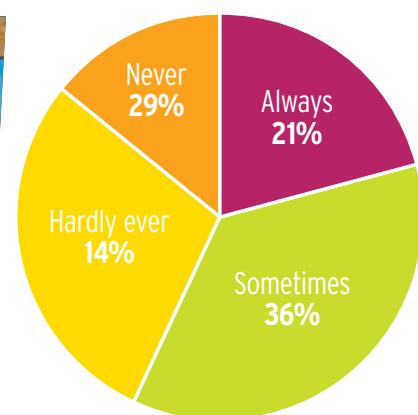
READER POLL

Do you get value for money when visiting France?

Always Often Sometimes Never

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LAST MONTH WE ASKED:
How often do you fly to France on holiday?



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Where to stay... for a relaxing break

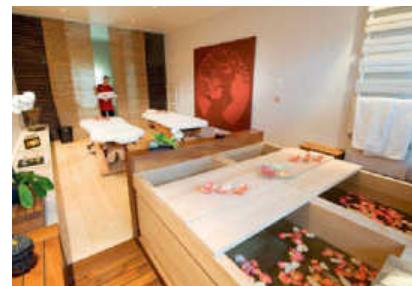
From spas and châteaux to a house in the trees, we have some of the best places in France to enjoy a little pampering

► ALLIANCE PORNIC, Loire-Atlantique

I lie back, still with apprehension, as a therapist busies herself with a mud-coloured concoction. Its seaside aroma smells familiar: algae, I realise. She sets about layering it thickly to my skin while listing the many amazing minerals that seaweed contains. Entirely covered in sloppy goo, I'm wrapped in a heated blanket and left to drift gently into drowsiness. Who knew a seaweed wrap could be so relaxing?

I am having my first experience of thalassotherapy – the term given to treatments involving sea water and marine minerals. It is popular in many French seaside towns for its restorative properties and is believed to help everything from detoxing to weight loss.

It's the speciality of the Alliance Thalasso resort where I'm staying in the Loire-Atlantique *département*. The 112-room spa-hotel curls like



a wave around a clifftop, overlooking restless Atlantic rollers and a secluded, sandy creek.

From the resort, a short, picturesque walk along a coastal path takes you to Pornic. In summer, this harbour town is a thriving holiday destination for Parisians exchanging cityscape for seaside, but in off-season it is wonderfully sedate. Taking a morning stroll, I have the beach to myself, apart from fishermen and their fresh catch.

Aside from the algae wraps, the spa offers all sorts of tempting treatments. Clients can benefit from a personalised set that ranges from beauty cures to golfers' packages. I opt for a detoxifying Vichy shower, where my skin is toned by jets shooting tepid seawater, before a luxurious back massage during which I'm lulled into a state of utter Zen by the sound of tinkling music and the smell of aromatic oils.

The hotel's two restaurants have



a healthy vibe too. On the lower floor, in the elegant La Source, diners look out over the ocean while tucking into mouth-watering seafood dishes. Upstairs, La Terrasse is a more unusual eatery, offering an organic menu based around a Hindu-based Ayurvedic diet specifically designed for detoxing.

My spacious en-suite room comes with sea views and a comfy dressing gown – a uniform adopted by most spa guests. It's certainly handy for my many trips back and forth to the two swimming pools, relaxation room, sauna, gym and hammam. The result is an utterly relaxing experience, by the end of which I feel toxin-free and rinsed though with the purity of the ocean.

Zoë McIntyre

Rue de la Source le Clion

44210 Pornic

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www.thalassopornic.com

Doubles from £199 including breakfast.

▼ Orion tree houses B&B, Provence

For an unusual experience in a natural setting, the accommodation at this B&B is built in the treetops of a wood near the village of Saint-Paul-de-Vence. Each of the four tree houses, named after characters in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, is built of wood, with matching furniture and luxury beds. Guests have their own terraces and access to a refrigerator, microwave oven and kitchen. There is also a summer cottage, named after *The Jungle Book*'s Lone Wolf Akela, made from whitewashed stone and set under the palm trees.

Breakfast is taken outdoors in the summer kitchen when the weather is

warm. In winter, it is either delivered to your tree house or served in the indoor breakfast room. For other meals there is a suggested list of local restaurants.

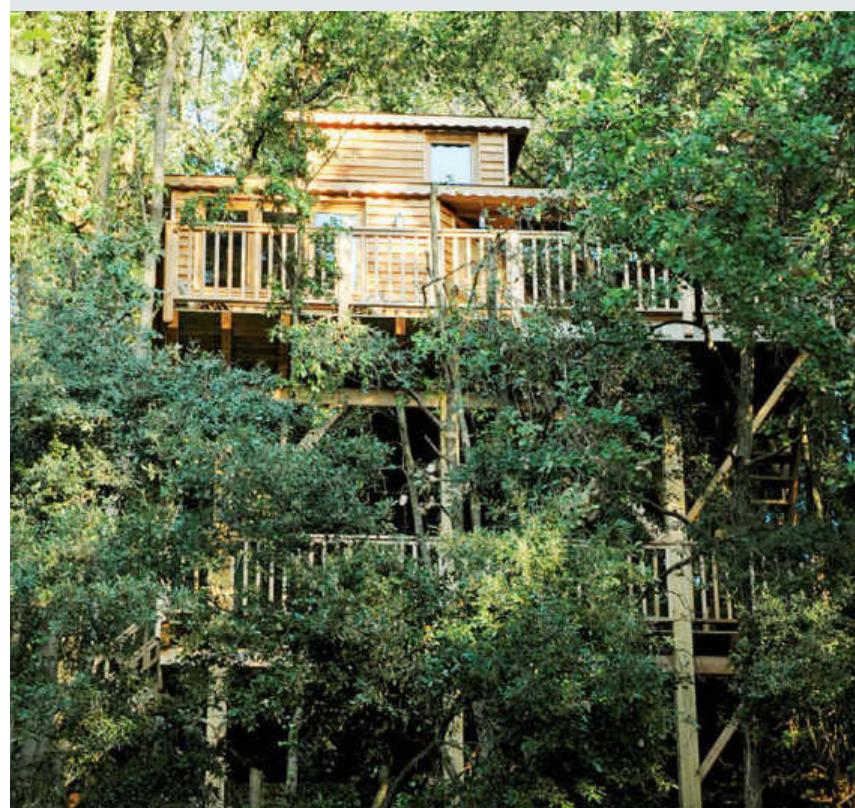
Massage and yoga can be arranged and there is a sauna on site. You can also relax in a natural swimming pool, surrounded by lush vegetation, or take advantage of a *boules* court if you're feeling energetic.

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Tree houses from €230 per night with breakfast; cottage from €360 (minimum two nights), one-hour massage with essential oils €70. ➤





▲► HOSTELLERIE LA CHENEAUDIÈRE & SPA, Alsace

Set in the quiet Bruche Valley in the Vosges mountains, this comfortable hotel has a spa that was built only a year ago, with a panoramic roof terrace. As it is constructed of natural materials and has large windows in many of the treatment rooms overlooking the valley, the spa creates a feeling of the outdoors inside.

Everything is geared to creating a sense of wellbeing: from its three pools, steam room, sensory shower, micro-bubbling beach and four saunas to the beauty products made by the owner from plants growing in the surrounding countryside. It also has what is claimed to be the largest flotation tank in Europe, where you can have a 50-minute float with soothing lights and underwater music followed by a massage with herbs and honey ointment.

The 38 bedrooms are cosy, decorated in a mixture of styles from classic French to 1950s minimalism. The restaurant offers traditional cuisine from local producers and a head chef, Roger Bouhassoun, who specialises in delicious sauces. For true leisure time there are books and chess sets in the lounge bar, the perfect place to end the day with a brandy before bed.

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▼ SPA MARIN DU VAL- ANDRÉ, Côtes-d'Armor

With a prime position opposite a long stretch of sweeping sands in the Brittany resort of Pléneuf, this hotel is a haven for those seeking a relaxing stay with a maritime twist. The spacious rooms open on to a 900sq metre seafront deck, allowing you to sunbathe and breathe in the sea spray. Opt for a sea-view room to wake up to the sound of waves from *la Manche* lapping against the shore.

A stroll downstairs leads to the spa and thalassotherapy centre, where guests can choose from treatments as varied as a deep seaweed wrap to a hot stone massage in one of the 17 treatment rooms. A highlight is the hydro-active, heated seawater pool – lie back in the

underwater chair and take in the sea views as your aches are massaged away.

Relaxation doesn't end when you exit the spa; mosey on into the snazzy hotel bar area and plunge into a deep chair ready for the barman to serve you the speciality 'tearoom' menu complete with fruity cocktails and sweet treats. If that isn't enough, turn up the relaxation dial a notch further and visit the restaurant for an imaginative seafood supper; dine on the terrace and raise a toast to the sun as it melts over the horizon.

Peter Stewart

43 Rue Charles de Gannes
22370 Pléneuf-Val-André
Tel: (Fr) 2 56 57 50 00
www.thalasso-resort-bretagne.com
Doubles from €196.



▼ HOTEL & SPA DES PÊCHEURS, Corsica

This peaceful hotel lies on the small island of Cavallo, a 15-minute boat trip from the southern tip of Corsica, and has been built to blend in with the natural surroundings. The 50 terraced bedrooms have sea and garden views, cool tiled floors and a restful pale blue and sand colour decor.

The spa echoes the same natural colours and specialises in Thai massages and facials. It offers an extensive menu of 'rituals' involving fragranced scrubs and oil massages designed to deep-clean and moisturise the whole body. If all you fancy is chilling out, you can sit in the gardens, lie by the seaside pool or stroll down to a sandy beach and the rocky shoreline of the Mediterranean.

In the evening, a quiet drink in the bar will give you a ringside seat to admire the sunset, and you can enjoy your evening meal listening to the waves lapping against the walls below the restaurant and looking out over a calm, subtly lit inlet from the sea.

Île de Cavallo
20169 Bonifacio
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 70 36 39
www.hoteldespecheurs.com
Doubles from €350; treatments from €55 for a head, neck and face massage to €280 for a full spa experience.



▲▼► Les Petits Prés, Épernay

Tucked behind a high wall just a few minutes from Épernay's town centre, the idyllic *maison d'hôtes* is a veritable oasis. Tacked on to the main house, a pretty 19th-century '*maison bourgeoise*', of owners Sylvie and Emmanuel Robinet, this impeccably decorated place is a perfect bolthole for those exploring the region's vineyards and champagne houses.

After Monsieur welcomed us warmly at the front door, we drove around to the back and into the courtyard with its pretty garden and manicured lawns. The layout of the house is unorthodox, with a small kitchen-diner and large bathroom on the ground floor, and a sitting room and two bedrooms upstairs reached by a narrow wooden staircase. In reality, it works perfectly for those who want to chill out.

The simple kitchen, with a small round table and brightly coloured chairs, offers all those holiday 'musts' - a coffee machine and a selection of teas. With just one hob, only one-pot recipes are possible; but eating out is preferable when the town centre is so near. Breakfast, on the other hand, must be eaten in. When we came down, the most delicious spread had appeared - bread, croissants, more teas and coffees, jams, spreads and other delicious treats - making it better than many hotel breakfasts I've enjoyed.

Upstairs, the decor is stylish, modern and immaculately done.



Bare floorboards are laid with soft rugs, while two ochre-yellow chairs and a small sofa surround a stylish coffee table. There are splashes of personality too - a rooster stands proudly in the corner, while a portrait of a uniformed cat stares out in earnest.

The bedrooms offer crisp, cream linen-laid beds and nautical stripes; on the walls, Hollywood photographs add a touch of glamour. With a double and a twin room accessed through the first room, it's ideal for a family. A TV, with French channels, is in the lounge if you want it, but the best entertainment comes in the kitchen's red 1950s-style fridge: a bottle of Laurent Perrier chilled to perfection. After pacing the Avenue de Champagne and exploring the smaller champagne producers of the area, what better way to wind down in such a bijou sitting room than with a glass of bubbles in hand?

Carolyn Boyd

32 Rue des Petits Prés
51200 Épernay
Tel: (Fr) 6 37 55 82 79
www.sawdays.co.uk
From €150 per night, sleeps four. ➤





► LES SOURCES DE CAUDALIE, near Bordeaux

The hotel lies in the midst of the vineyards of Château Smith Haut Lafitte, a Bordeaux *Grand Cru* estate. There are 40 rooms and 21 suites, individually decorated in rich fabrics and bold colours to reflect the region's character. Some of the suites are individual buildings on stilts dotted around the hotel's lake.

The restaurants have been variously formed from an old orangery and wash house. The former has a terrace overlooking the lake and the vineyard, where you can enjoy a local and seasonal menu; the latter has bistro-style food and a covered terrace. In addition there is a wine bar that serves food and wine from Aquitaine and a cosy bar that opens into the wine cellar where you can while away a relaxed evening sampling the old Armagnacs and whiskies.

The Vinothérapie Spa draws on naturally heated spring water that comes from 540 metres below and is rich in minerals. The treatments reflect the hotel's location and are based on viniculture: the selection includes red vine baths, massages with fresh grapes and facial creams made from grape products.

33650 Bordeaux-Martillac

Tel: (Fr) 5 57 83 83 83

www.sources-caudalie.com

Doubles from €224; *Rituel des Sources* half-day signature treatment €230pp.



▼ LA VILLA DE MAZAMET, Midi-Pyrénées

This small hotel is perfectly placed if you want to explore the cities of Carcassonne, Albi and Castres in south-west France, but if you're not feeling so energetic it is an oasis in the market town of Mazamet.

The imposing former family home contains five well-appointed bedrooms, providing an intimate atmosphere and everything needed for a luxury stay. The rooms have parquet floors, sumptuous beds with deep mattresses and Egyptian cotton sheets, plus extras including free bottled water, Gilchrist & Soames toiletries, bathrobes and slippers, and a Tassimo hot drinks machine.

The tall windows look out over the valley with the Montagne Noire in the distance, and down into the walled garden and the swimming pool where you can dine under the stars. The food comes from local sources and the villa's own kitchen garden.

The villa offers a 'Petit Spa' in the converted wine cellars where there is a sauna, wet room and whirlpool bath. A choice of classic massages and aromatherapy can be enjoyed in a room on an upper floor where you have restful views of the mountains.

To complete your relaxing stay there are two lounges: one for quiet reading and peaceful contemplation, the other for card and board games. If you're looking for reading matter, there are magazines and a selection of books you can borrow.

4 Rue Pasteur

81200 Mazamet

Tel: (Fr) 5 63 97 90 33

www.villademazamet.com

Doubles from €110 including breakfast; two hours in spa €20, massages from €35.

PHOTOGRAPHS: XAVIER BÉJOT





▲ Château des Tourelles, Loire-Atlantique

Imagine a story-book castle and it may look something like the Château des Tourelles. It is perfectly symmetrical and pearly white with cloud-grazing, witches'-hat turrets and views over an inky-blue sea and vanilla-sand beaches.

The 19th-century castle is part of the recently opened Relais Thalasso, a super-sleek, four-star spa-hotel set on an unblemished stretch of Atlantic coastline east of La Baule-Escoublac. The castle's fairy-tale façade makes a startling contrast to the rest of the adjacent complex, which is ultra-modern, complete with thalassotherapy and spa facilities, indoor and outdoor pools and a restaurant.

On arrival, something about the place makes me feel instantly at ease - maybe it's the inviting armchairs and nail-bar in the open-plan lobby or the attentive staff, ready to take my bags and talk me through the spa treatments. It feels both stylish and relaxed - families with children play at the pool table and groups of friends saunter in and out of the restaurant.

In the spa, where a hushed and luxurious atmosphere prevails, the diverse programme of treatments caters to every beauty whim or

relaxation fancy; there are massages, body wraps, manicures and pedicures with many holistic approaches to body toning, detoxing and slowing down skin ageing. I adore my 50-minute facial, which feels relaxing and nourishing as the intuitive therapist applies organic oils, softening scrubs and moisture-rich creams to my face and neck, leaving my complexion refreshed.

My room is plushly decorated in cream and violet hues complete with plasma television, a Nespresso coffee machine and the comfiest bed imaginable. Sliding glass doors cover one wall, leading on to a private balcony where I find my perfect spot; settled into a wicker lounge chair taking in the sea breeze with a vantage point over the château spires.

Away from the calm of the spa, the hotel's light-filled restaurant is pleasantly buzzy. This is particularly true on Sundays when an extensive buffet brunch offers fresh seafood, sushi and salads. There are also pastries and desserts for those who are feeling a little less virtuous.

Anyone looking for more energetic activities can go on a beachcombing expedition or stroll into the quiet town of Pornichet, which has a delightful market every Wednesday and Saturday.

ZM

1 Avenue Léon Dubas

Pointe du Bec

44380 Pornichet

Tel: (Fr) 2 40 60 80 80

www.thalasso-tourelles.com

Doubles from €119; Évasion package including three treatments and lunch from €139pp.

▼ VILLA KERASY HÔTEL & SPA, Morbihan

It is just a couple of hours' drive from the ferry port of Saint-Malo, but with the Indian influences in its rooms and spa, this hotel in Vannes transports you much further, to an Asia of past centuries.

The owners spent many years travelling on the Indian sub-continent and the Far East, and have collected fascinating decorative items, porcelains, silks and damasks to create an eastern atmosphere in southern Brittany. The bedrooms represent stopovers that the Breton sailors would have made on the Spice Route and are equipped with everything you need for a relaxing stay.

The spa specialises in Ayurvedic techniques to balance the mind, body, senses and emotions, and offers various all-inclusive packages with a personalised programme of treatments to de-stress, refresh and re-energise. You can also practise yoga and meditation or have massages and facials.

To complete your wellbeing experience, the hotel will prepare Ayurvedic cuisine, home-cooked and using fresh organic produce and spices, which is delivered to your room.

20 Avenue Favrel et Lincy

56000 Vannes

Tel: (Fr) 2 97 68 36 83

www.villakerasy.com

Doubles from €107; Discover Ayurveda package from €99pp. ➤



▼ LA CLAIRIÈRE, Bas-Rhin

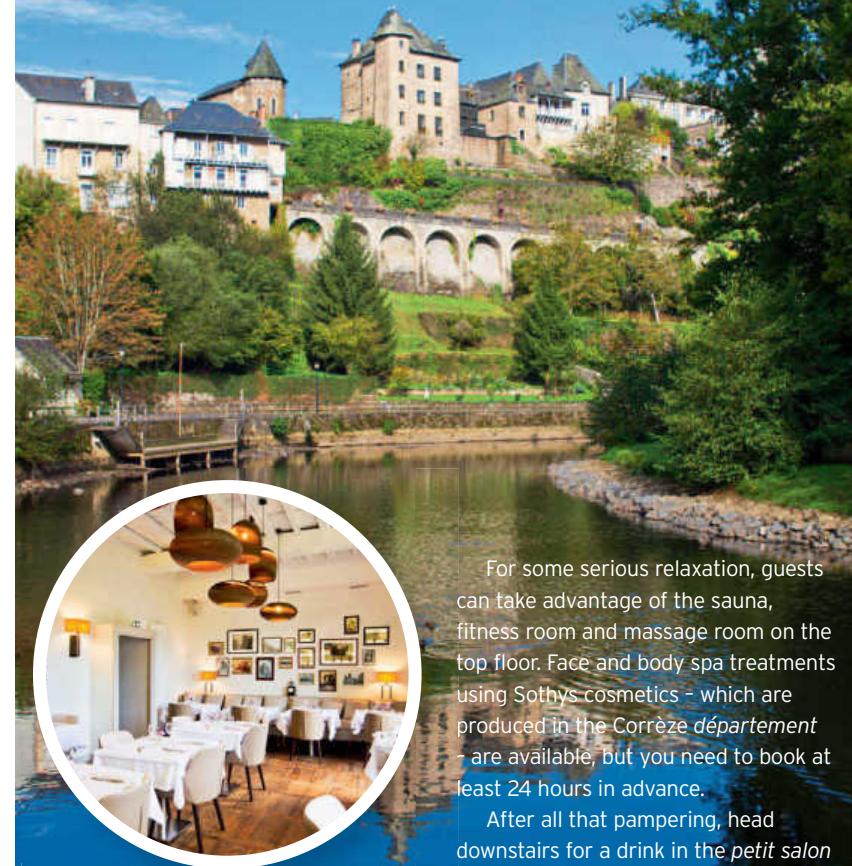
As the name implies, this hotel, spa and wellbeing centre has been built in a clearing, which lies in woodland on the slopes of a hillside in the Northern Vosges regional nature park in Alsace. Fresh air and a peaceful environment complement the detox and de-stressing treatments, yoga and meditation offered in the spa.

The philosophy of the hotel is to stimulate the senses by exposing guests to the five elements of earth, water, fire, space and air, which they explain as the earthy smells of the surrounding forest and the organic, locally grown food prepared by their chefs, the mineral-rich local water, the heat of the saunas and steam baths, the tranquillity of the environment and the oxygen-rich mountain air. The goal of the family owners is to give guests a holiday where you can leave behind the strains of everyday life and recharge your batteries in a natural rural environment.

Most of the 50 rooms have balconies overlooking the woodlands (the exceptions are the single rooms) and are decorated in contemporary style using wood and organic fabrics. Extras include bathrobes and slippers, bottled water and access to the spa.

63 Route d'Ingwiller
67290 La Petite-Pierre
Tel: (Fr) 3 88 71 75 00
www.la-clairiere.com

Doubles from €126pp per night including breakfast; Escapade Zen package including B&B, three-course dinner and 50-minute spa treatment from €236pp per day.



▲▼ Hôtel Joyet de Maubec, Corrèze

There can't be many better places to relax than in a renovated château in a pretty medieval town surrounded by verdant countryside, as I discover on arriving at the Hôtel Joyet du Maubec deep in Limousin.

As soon as I step inside, I feel the stresses of life melting away as the owners Daniel and Thierry take my suitcase and show me up to my stylish room on the second floor.

A former tax office, the château has been transformed into an elegant hotel. Located in the hilltop town of Uzerche, it has commanding views of the town and the River Vézère, which I enjoy from the bedroom window and the restaurant terrace.

My room is luxurious with a soft bed, sofa, television with English channels, free coffee and, most excitingly, a huge bathroom built in the château tower. The bathroom has a stand-alone bath, rainfall shower and soft white robes - heaven!

For some serious relaxation, guests can take advantage of the sauna, fitness room and massage room on the top floor. Face and body spa treatments using Sothys cosmetics - which are produced in the Corrèze département - are available, but you need to book at least 24 hours in advance.

After all that pampering, head downstairs for a drink in the *petit salon* - a cosy room with a self-service bar, leather armchairs and book-lined shelves - before moving to the restaurant, La Treille Muscate, to enjoy local specialities and top-quality wine.

Breakfast comprises home-made croissants and *pain au chocolat*, freshly squeezed orange juice, fruit, yogurt and as much coffee as you can drink. On sunny mornings you can eat on the terrace listening to the peaceful sounds of the river. The perfect way to round off a relaxing stay.

Emma Rawle

Place des Vignerons
19140 Uzerche
Tel: (Fr) 5 55 97 20 60
www.hotel-joyet-maubec.com
Doubles from €85, breakfast €14;
treatments from €65.



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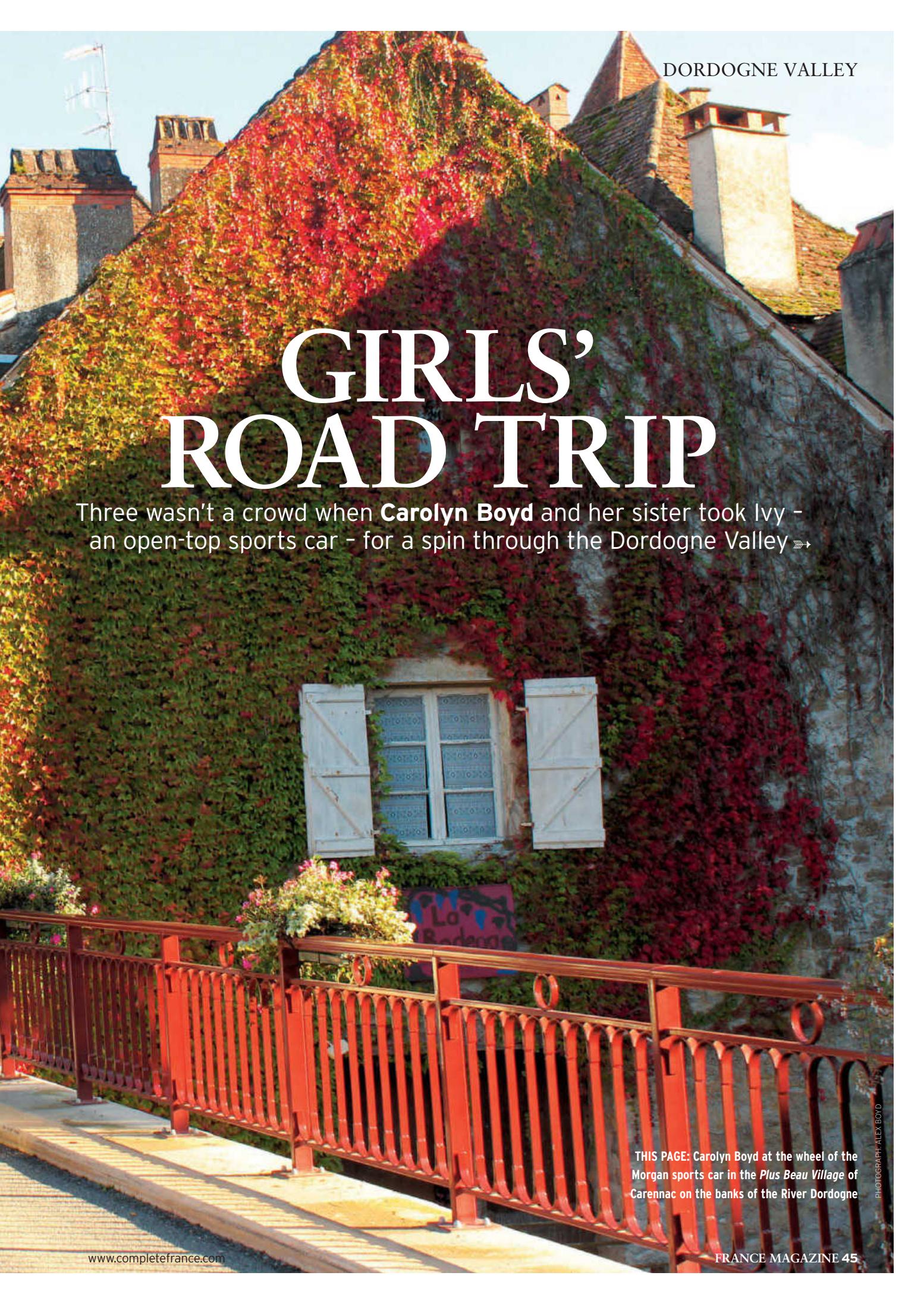
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DORDOGNE VALLEY

GIRLS' ROAD TRIP

Three wasn't a crowd when **Carolyn Boyd** and her sister took Ivy - an open-top sports car - for a spin through the Dordogne Valley ➤

THIS PAGE: Carolyn Boyd at the wheel of the Morgan sports car in the *Plus Beau Village* of Carennac on the banks of the River Dordogne

PHOTOGRAPH: ALEX BOYD

When my sister Alex and I boarded the plane to Bergerac for a quick weekend away, we didn't know there would be a third lady joining us, even less so that her presence would make such an impact on every place we visited. Her long, pale body and smooth features were certainly beautiful so, in hindsight, it stood to reason that she would be the most alluring member of our party.

We met her at Bergerac Airport, where Andy from CC Sports Cars introduced us: "She's called Ivy," he said. We stared in awe. Not only was Ivy beautiful, she was spotless. "Get in!" he called, beckoning me into the Morgan – a sister vehicle to one named Holly. As I sat in the stunning cream car, with walnut dash and steering wheel, I felt a stroke of fear come over me; we were here for a carefree Thelma-and-Louise-style road trip, yet we had taken responsibility for Ivy, one of Andy's most precious vehicles. It was terrifying, yet, at the same time, absolutely thrilling.

Our destination was the Château de la Treyne, a striking, turreted castle hotel perched on the River Dordogne, and our plan was to spend two days pottering around the pretty villages nearby, soaking up the autumnal atmosphere as the trees turned golden. Not a bad plan, as it goes. The husbands, left behind on childcare duties, were as green as envy can be.

{ Oncoming motorists smiled as we passed them and Ivy did her best to impress }

Andy ran through the motions of how to put the top down, how to put the top up, how to take out the window panes and store them carefully in their bag. He gave us a few tips on how to manoeuvre such a long, low vehicle, which was almost exactly opposite in shape to the decrepit Toyota I usually drive; that is to say all out the front and hardly anything behind (there is surely a pun to be made there, but I'll refrain).

After a quick spin up the road and back with Andy sitting next to me for tutelage, we were on our own. The road was wet from the rain that had been falling earlier that day and, as it was already mid-afternoon, we kept the roof up, hoping for roof-down weather the next day. It was a two-hour drive to the hotel, so we had to get a move-on before we lost the light. Being so low, and coping with a tiny windscreens, I wasn't keen to drive in darkness on day one, but it was an easy route following the River Dordogne to Sarlat and on from there. Ivy's engine purred as we drove away, through Bergerac's suburbia and into the villages that line the river east. Oncoming motorists smiled as we passed them and Ivy did her best to impress.

But then there was a hitch. Just 15 minutes into the journey, we came across a roadblock – the route to Sarlat was closed. Pulling in for a moment, we checked the map and scouted out an alternative using smaller back roads that looped around through hamlets and forests. If I had been nervous before about somehow damaging the car, now I was petrified.



We headed north and, after stalling a few times at junctions, I started to get used to the low car and its beautiful mechanics. Hand-built Morgans are the perfect vehicle for those who want the glamour of a classic car without the hard work and upkeep of a vintage model. Ivy had been bought new in 2012 from the Morgan factory in Malvern, Worcestershire – albeit with left-hand drive for France – and under that sleek bonnet was a Ford 2.0L engine. This baby was born for driving, not for tinkering.

We cruised along, winding this way and that. The rain came and went, and as we pottered through forests of yellow-leaved silver birch trees and small villages, wafts of wood-smoke filled the air. As we neared Lacave and followed signs to the Château de la Treyne, the light was fading. We'd made it. Ivy was unblemished and we were ready for a stiff drink.

The hotel's owner, Stéphanie Gombert, welcomed us into the beautiful salon with a glass of champagne each. A roaring fire warmed our faces and Stéphanie booked our table for dinner. Being mid-October, the hotel had only recently stopped serving meals on its terrace overlooking the river, so we were due to eat in the dining room with walls bedecked with antique tapestries.

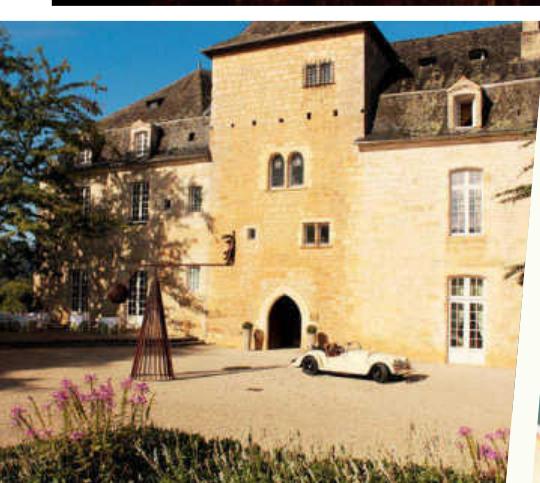
The concierge showed us to our room, which was certainly befitting of a guest such as Ivy (shame she had to stay out in the cold). With a lovely carved wooden ceiling and leaded windows that looked out over the river, the room just oozed history and we felt like princesses. Adding to the wow factor was a striking gold bath standing in the centre of the circular bathroom, which was in the château's tower. As darkness fell, we peered out of the window and a low mist hugged the river. It was good to be cosy inside, though I was already missing Ivy.

The next morning, it was as if we had stepped two months back in time to high summer – the sun was blazing by 9am and it was definitely roof-down weather. High fives all round. The plan was to pootle over to Rocamadour for a tour and lunch, and then take a loop around the villages of the Lot département. Ivy was ready, and so were we.

Sadly the Grace Kelly-esque headscarves had to be replaced by peaked caps – on Andy's instruction – given that there was no sun visor and the autumn sun was low in the sky. But it wasn't long before we realised it didn't matter how we looked – it was only Ivy who was going to turn heads.

After we had driven into the car park opposite Rocamadour's tourist office, another car passed by and then screeched to ➤

DORDOGNE VALLEY



FACING PAGE: The Salon Cardaillac at the Château de la Treyne hotel in Lacave; **THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP:** The hotel's dramatic setting beside the River Dordogne; The gold-coloured bath in the Favorite suite; The Salon Louis XIII dining room; The Morgan outside the hotel; Alex and Carolyn in headscarves (which had to be replaced by peaked caps in the car)



The road led us under golden cliffs and dipped into valleys wooded with walnut groves

a halt; the driver pulled in beside us without saying a word. As we wound up the roof and put it back into place, in order to leave the car secure, the driver hopped out of his car and simply stared. At Ivy. We were quite incidental, so much so that even as we walked away to meet our tour guide, the man just carried on staring for five minutes before driving off again. My sister and I looked at each other and giggled. Who knew the French would be so enamoured with a British sports car? And how much more excited would they have been to drive it?

Thankfully, that privilege was all ours.

After lunch in Rocamadour, we continued out into the Causses du Quercy regional park. As the sun shone down on our heads and the temperature rose to 25°C, we followed the roads lined with grey stone walls and with neat green fields on either side. The road led us under golden cliffs and dipped down into valleys wooded with walnut groves, and we admired the Virginia creepers that had turned russet red against golden stone houses. The roads were almost empty and so too were the

SAME
PLACE,
DIFFERENT
PACE

The Walnut Route

Autumn is the perfect time to visit this area to follow the Route de la Noix. With distilleries, oil mills, walnut groves, markets and pretty villages to explore, as the leaves turn golden, it's an ideal place to stock up on treats for winter. Among the best destinations is the Moulin à Huile de Noix (tel: (Fr) 5 65 37 40 69, www.moulin-martel.com) just outside Martel. Here the friendly Castagné family will introduce you to the many facets of walnut production, with Madame running the auberge-restaurant, cooking up delights using walnut oil, which is in turn produced by Monsieur and their oldest son Romain in the working mill below. Meanwhile in Souillac, the Distillerie Louis Roque (tel: (Fr) 5 65 32 78 16, www.lavieilleprune.com) has a wonderful display of old copper distilling wares and tools. The distillery's range of liqueurs and aperitifs includes walnut wine and its famous prune liqueur. For more information, visit www.visit-dordogne-valley.co.uk

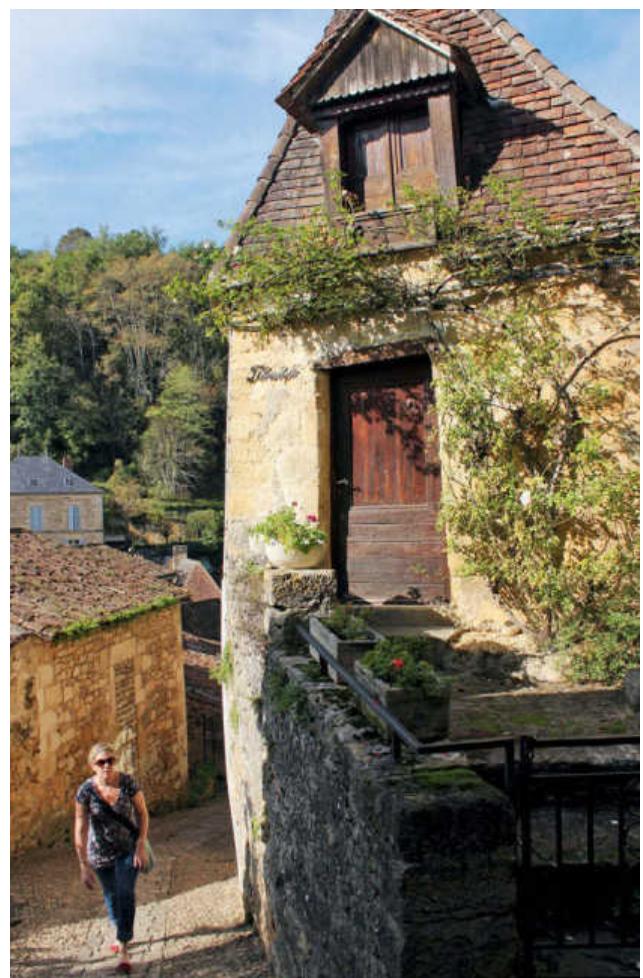
villages; at Autoire, a *Plus Beau Village*, it seemed everyone was having a siesta as we wandered through. At Carenac, another *Plus Beau Village*, the low sun cast long shadows on the narrow, cobbled streets and we spent some time in the peace and tranquillity of the beautiful 11th-century Église Saint-Pierre and its cloisters. The bridge out of the village provided the perfect backdrop for a photo or two of Ivy set against the Virginia creepers, while the lack of traffic and tourists meant we had all the time in the world.

As we neared Rocamadour on the return journey, we stopped to admire the cliff-side village as the evening light cast a dusky glow, and a hot-air balloon prepared for lift-off in the valley below. With my sister at the wheel (as nervous as I had been at first), it turned out the open roof was perfect for photos and as we passed Lacave's Château de Belcastel perched high above on a rocky promontory, I couldn't stop snapping.

On our return to the Château de la Treyne, the evening was still warm and the outdoor pool beckoned. It seemed absurd even to be considering it in the middle of October. We quizzed the concierge about our foolish idea. "We turned the heating off yesterday," he told us, encouragingly. "It should still be quite warm." With another 90 minutes until dinner, it seemed a risk worth taking. And indeed it was. With not another visitor in sight, the pool was our own and it was heaven. After several lengths in the invigorating water, we shivered our way back to the hotel for a shower, feeling like daredevils.

The next morning, the Indian summer showed no sign of abating, and a white mist had descended on the beautiful rose garden at the front of the hotel – the sight could not have been more fairy tale. We bid fond farewells to Stéphanie and her team, and drove off across the bridge over the River Dordogne, which offers a great view of the château.

Having done our homework this time on road closures, we established that the only detour needed was towards Bergerac, and that we could follow the Dordogne up to that point. With the classic villages of La Roque-Gageac and Beynac-et-Cazenac en route and the sky a perfect blue, it would be a glorious run back to the airport to reunite Ivy with Andy.



Though the height of the tourist season had passed, market day in Sarlat made for a busy town, which brought a return of the adrenalin from the start of our journey. As we neared a roundabout the traffic was slow, but a friendly wave came from the driver of another classic sports car. We waved back, grinning from ear to ear, embracing the camaraderie of the open-tops. We also turned heads among the pedestrians, while a motorhome driver looked at us slack-jawed, as if to suggest we weren't worthy of such a chariot.

Our route took us on towards the river and we dropped down from Sarlat to La Roque-Gageac. Parking under the trees at the far end of the village, we sauntered along the road admiring the traditional *gabare* sailing barges gliding up and down the river. We took a seat on the terrace of the Belle Étoile, under a vine-covered pergola. Surrounded by French families enjoying a weekend lunch, we felt in good hands. A delicious meal followed and it was with a heavy heart that we ordered coffee – our trip was nearly at an end.

Our final stop wasn't far, and as we neared Beynac-et-Cazenac, I was grateful again for Ivy's open-top roof. With Alex at the wheel, I could lean back and admire the striking ➤

CLOCKWISE, FROM FACING PAGE: A clear road ahead in the village of Carenac; The *Plus Beau Village* of Autoire; Panoramic views in La Roque-Gageac; Time for a stroll in the winding alleyways of Beynac-et-Cazenac; Buildings in the heart of Rocamadour cling to the cliff-face



château above us, as the road wound its way underneath. We parked Ivy at the boat station at the bottom of the village and prepared to hike up the steep path to the castle.

The view from the top was sensational. Under a crisp blue sky, punctuated by a few faint wisps of cloud, we looked over the river and the rolling countryside beyond. With hardly anyone around, it was hard to believe that this place would be heaving in peak summer. After a quick Orangina in a café, we made the descent down the cobbled street and arrived back at the car park where we found that a small audience had gathered around Ivy. The four men were looking in admiration at the Morgan and as we neared the car their faces were pictures of astonishment as these two women got in and drove it away.

Following the river, the road wove its way through the countryside but as we approached Bergerac the dual-carriageway really opened up. With almost no other traffic around I could, for the first time, really put my foot down and see Ivy just fly. With the wind in our hair, and the sun on our faces, it was absolutely exhilarating. For our final ride, we couldn't have wished for a better run. Forget Thelma and Louise, when it comes to a girls' road trip, I would take Ivy, any day. ☺

ABOVE, FROM LEFT: The road wends its way beneath the château at Beynac-et-Cazenac; A gabare barge sails serenely along the River Dordogne at La Roque-Gageac; **BELOW:** Ivy the sports car says farewell to the Château de la Treyne in the distance



Francophile

Gear up for a motoring trip in the Dordogne Valley



GETTING THERE

By air: Ryanair and Flybe fly to Bergerac. See page 23 for more details.

By train: The rail journey from Paris Montparnasse takes just under five hours, changing at Libourne. By ferry/road: Bergerac is a 6hr journey from Caen and an 8.5hr journey from Calais.

GETTING AROUND

To hire a Morgan with CC Sports Cars for two days costs €340 per day (€295 for three or more days), with €35 for an extra driver. The firm has other cars for hire, including a Citroën 2CV, MGB and Ford Mustang. Tel: (Fr) 5 63 94 58 31 www.ccsporcars.co.uk

WHERE TO STAY

Château de la Treyne 46200 Lacave Tel: (Fr) 5 65 27 60 60 www.chateau-delatreyne.com Doubles from €200. (For this and two other restaurants in this area, see our 'Where to eat' section in the August issue or see www.completefrance.com).

FOR AN APÉRO

Sip a glass of the local walnut wine at Le Petit Moulin, in Martel. Run by Adrien Castagné, whose family runs the walnut mill that produces the *vin de noix* he serves, this lovely little bar also offers a simple menu on the terrace or in a cosy room upstairs.

Tel: (Fr) 6 59 59 27 66 www.lepetitmoulinmartel.com

WHERE TO EAT

Restaurant Gastronomique le Jehan de Valon Hôtel Beau Site Cité Médiévale 46500 Rocamadour Tel: (Fr) 5 65 33 63 08 www.bestwestern-beausite.com

Dine on a lovely terrace overlooking the gorge. Mains from €18, menus from €27.

La Belle Étoile

24250 La Roque-Gageac Tel: (Fr) 5 53 29 51 44 www.hotel-belle-etoile-dordogne.fr Delicious food under a vine-covered pergola on the terrace. Menus from €30.



TOURIST INFORMATION: The area known as the Dordogne Valley spans two départements, the Dordogne and the Lot. Visit www.visit-dordogne-valley.co.uk (tel: (Fr) 5 65 33 22 00), or www.tourisme-lot.com and www.dordogne-perigord-tourisme.fr (tel: (Fr) 5 53 35 50 24). For more about the *Plus Beaux Villages* in the area, see www.les-plus-beaux-villages-de-france.org



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See Paris in a day

From the Eiffel Tower at sunrise to the Sacré-Coeur Basilica at sunset, **Pierre de Villiers** makes every minute count on a tour of the City of Light



ABOVE: The Eiffel Tower seen from the Palais de Chaillot at daybreak

It's a gloriously clear morning in Paris and on the Trocadéro a small, committed group of early risers has assembled for the greatest light show in town.

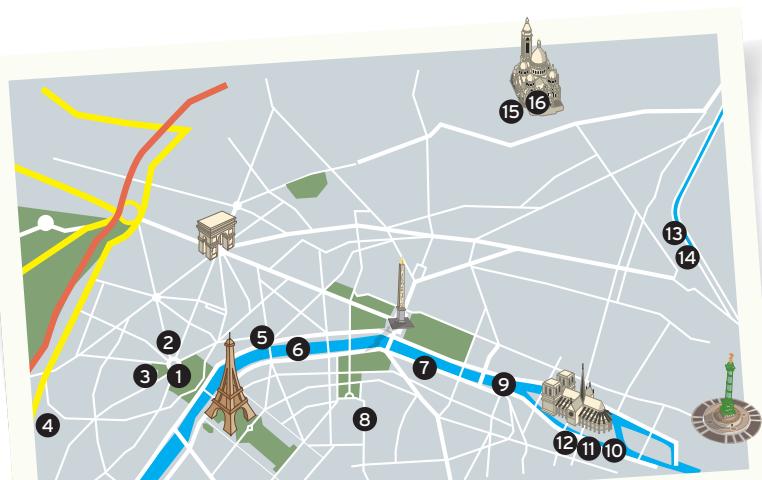
It starts with a molten strip across the horizon that grows ever brighter until the distinctive esplanade outside the Palais de Chaillot 1 has a pinkish glow. As the sun finally drags itself into

the sky it backlights the Eiffel Tower, on the other side of the River Seine, to stunning effect, turning the city's most recognisable landmark into a beautiful piece of shadow theatre.

Having a front-row seat to watch dawn breaking over the City of Light is the perfect start to my day. By the time the sun sets I will have endeavoured to get a real taste of what Paris has to offer, from expertly crafted pastries and great art to the majesty of the show-stopping sights and parks.

The lure of an early-morning coffee takes me to the nearby Place du Trocadéro et du 11 Novembre and to Carette 2 (tel: (Fr) 1 47 27 98 85, www.carette-paris.fr), a stylish art-deco *pâtisserie* that has been providing Parisians with a wake-up call since 1927. I try one of its signature treats – a selection of colourful *mini-macarons* – while a portrait of the founder, Madeleine Carette, who once ruled the shop from a high stool behind the cashbox, keeps an eye on things from the dining room wall.

Just down the road at the Cimetière de Passy 3 I pay my respects to Impressionist painter Édouard



Manet, who was laid to rest here in 1883, before I stride down Avenue Paul Doumer to marvel at the artist's work at the Musée Marmottan Monet ④. The museum also displays more than 300 works by Claude Monet and paintings by Camille Pissarro and Pierre-Auguste Renoir among many others. The building used to be a lodge for hunters, who had plenty of wild animals to shoot at in the bordering Forest of Rouvray (now the huge green space of the Bois de Boulogne). These days the only shooting of deer is with a camera at the Jardin d'Acclimatation at the northern end of the *bois*.

With lunch approaching I head down Rue de Passy towards the Seine and along the aptly named Avenue de New York to the beacon that is the *Flamme de la Liberté* ⑤. The full-sized, gold-leafed replica of the flame held by the Statue of Liberty is a glittering symbol of Franco-American friendship put up in 1989 to commemorate the centenary of the *International Herald Tribune* newspaper. For millions it is also an unofficial memorial to Diana, Princess of Wales, who was fatally injured in a car accident in the tunnel beneath the statue in 1997.

Gurning gargoyles

After a short stroll across the Pont de l'Alma, I reach my lunch destination, which will allow me to watch Paris go by as I dine. On board the *Cristal II*, run by Bateaux Parisiens (www.bateauxparisiens.com), I drift down the Seine ⑥ while nibbling on duck pâté, followed by multi-layered ice cream. The views that a boat ride provides of many Parisian sights are extraordinary. Four gilded winged horses frolic in the sun at the Pont Alexandre III, the Musée du Louvre looks splendid with the Pont Royal in the foreground, gurning gargoyles pass overhead as we inch underneath the Pont Neuf, Notre-Dame Cathedral peeks out from behind lush greenery and a replica of the Statue of Liberty reigns supreme on the Île aux Cygnes.

Equally fascinating is watching Parisians at play on the banks of the river. A busker sits alone with his guitar practising songs, students enjoy their salad days in riverside bars, smitten couples walk hand-in-hand, dog walkers mingle with sun worshippers – living in Paris has never looked more appetising.

Back on dry land I explore the Left Bank for a while. Outside the Musée d'Orsay ⑦ the statue of a rhino looks on incredulously as tourists stampede towards the front door. Inside, the list of paintings – Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Night Over the Rhône*, Paul Cézanne's *The Card Players*, Paul Gauguin's *Tahitian Women on the Beach* – reads like an artistic bucket list.

Ten minutes' walk away at the Musée Rodin ⑧ on Rue de Varenne, the sculptor's *Thinker* is still pondering life while a couple's passion is set in stone



FROM TOP: Breakfast time at Carette; Lunch on board the *Cristal II*; The rhino statue at the entrance to the Musée d'Orsay; Notre Dame Cathedral from the Pont de l'Archevêché

with *The Kiss*. Back at the Seine, at the Pont des Arts ⑨, it seems that *l'amour* has less staying power. The 45 tons of 'love locks' (padlocks attached by lovers to the bridge to signify their bond) caused part of the structure to collapse, prompting authorities to remove them in June. A number of locks remain on a fence near the bridge but, judging by the disappointment of today's tourists, it's just not the same. "I brought a special lock all the way from Canada to place on the bridge," one woman tells me. "I had no idea it was no longer allowed. I will have to find another spot to put it. Maybe start a new trend." ➤





ABOVE: Shakespeare and Company bookstore on the Left Bank; BELOW: The trendy Canal Saint-Martin area; RIGHT: The Sacré-Cœur Basilica at sunset

Further down the road, the Pont de l'Archevêché 10, with its gorgeous view of Notre Dame, is still covered in padlocks, giving the bridge a glistening outer shell. With the structure also showing metal fatigue some locks have been taken away and a complete clear-out is inevitable.

Across the road I visit one of the city's more permanent fixtures: the English-language bookstore Shakespeare and Company 11 (tel: (Fr) 1 43 25 40 93, <http://shakespeareandcompany.com>). The original opened in 1919 in Rue Dupuytren, before moving to Rue de l'Odéon, and attracted illustrious writers including Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. It closed in 1940.

The current shop, on Rue de la Bucherie, which opened in 1951, changed its name to Shakespeare and Company in 1964. Somehow it remains quaint and charming, despite wide exposure that has included appearances in the films *Midnight in Paris* and *Before Sunset*. "It's like going off the grid and taking a break from everything digital," I hear one American visitor say as she runs her hand along one of the bookshelves. "It's like the anti-Apple store."

A few doors down I stop for an aperitif at Le Petit Pont 12 (tel: (Fr) 1 43 54 23 81, [www.cafelepetitpont.com](http://cafelepetitpont.com)) and almost lose my eyebrows as my beer arrives with jumbo-sized sparklers randomly attached to the rim of the glass. The whoops and hollers of approval from nearby tables suggest it's a hangout for Sorbonne students.

As a late-afternoon party atmosphere takes hold in Paris I head back across the river in search of another watering hole, using a Hollywood A-lister as my guide. According to the locals, Brad Pitt never misses a chance to drop by at the Chez Prune café 13 in Rue Beaurepaire opposite Canal Saint-Martin whenever he is in Paris. It's easy to see why. Lived-in



but lively with odd decor (old photos, ornate vases and what looks like a mannequin head all share shelf space), it has a lot of character and a charcuterie plate to die for (tel: (Fr) 1 42 41 30 47).

Chez Prune reflects the mood and style of the Canal Saint-Martin area, one of the capital's trendiest neighbourhoods. Wall-art is everywhere and the streets are packed with boutiques and coffee shops such as Sésame 14 (tel: (Fr) 1 42 49 03 21), where followers of fashion can tuck into home-made cakes and stroke their designer beards.

With the light fading fast, I head for higher ground to take in the sunset. After a steep climb up Montmartre I take the weight off my feet at the Chez Plumeau restaurant 15 (tel: (Fr) 1 46 06 26 29), where the waiters are just the right side of cheeky (ordering a Coke is met with: "Ah, you would like some American Beaujolais"), the meat dishes are delicious and the views are inspiring.

As Montmartre starts to buzz there is time for one more sight. I meander over to Sacré-Cœur 16 and stand at the foot of the basilica as a red glow returns to Paris and the sun sets to the sound of 'oohs' and 'aahs' from a large selfie-taking crowd. Among the throng I spot a member of the Trocadéro breakfast club whom I had met earlier in the day, wearing an expression of fatigue and elation that I know all too well. ☺

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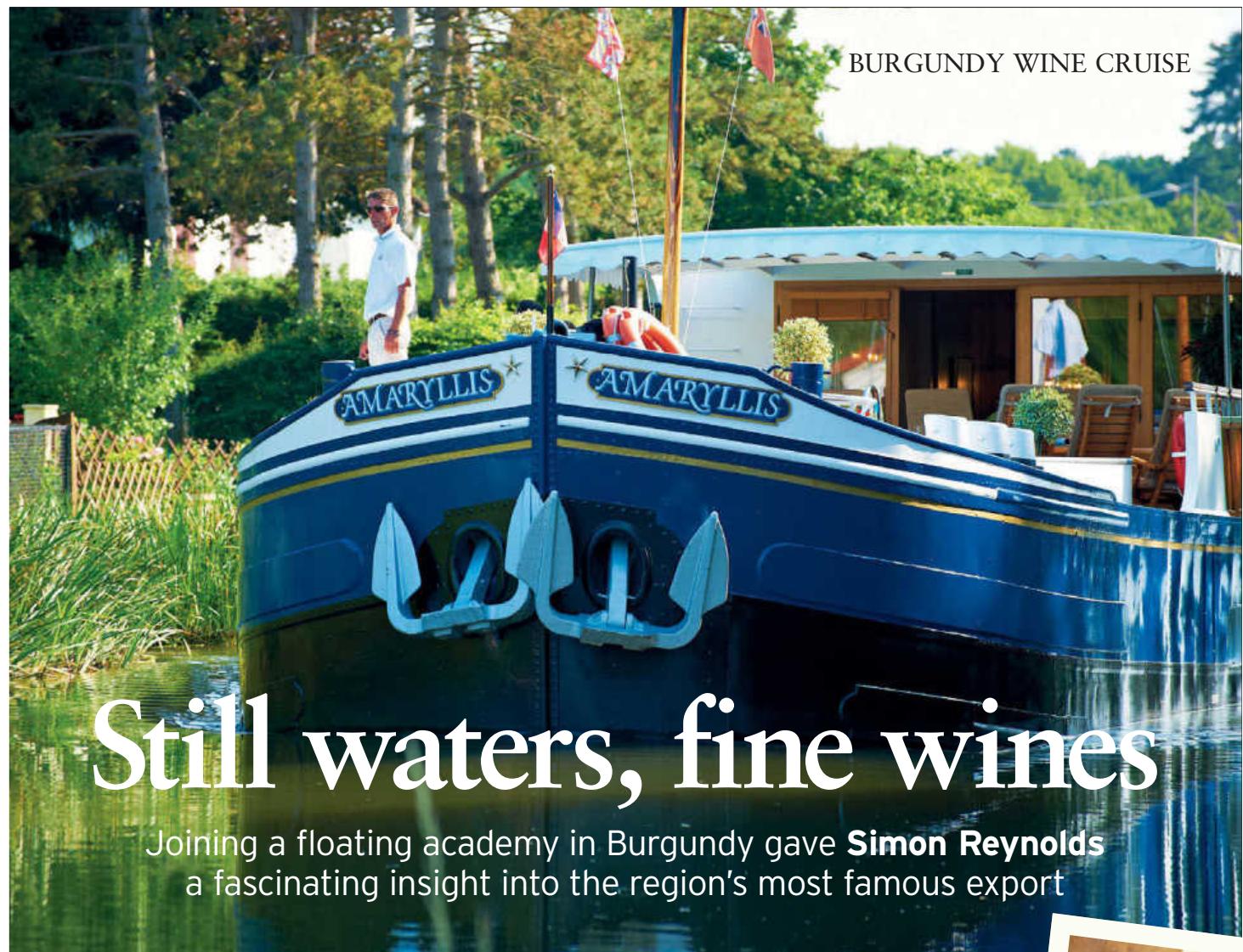
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Still waters, fine wines

Joining a floating academy in Burgundy gave **Simon Reynolds** a fascinating insight into the region's most famous export

The opening session of the wine academy had begun: the 'classroom' was the deck of a luxury barge; the setting was a tranquil Burgundy canal; the time was early evening and sunshine was rippling through the foliage on the tree-lined banks.

Our tutor, Pascal Wagner, who has more than 30 years' experience in the local wine trade, started with a question: "How much do you know about wine?" At this academy the 'syllabus' is tailored to the level of the participants, from enthusiastic beginners (like me) to serious collectors.

Having found out that we were all willing learners, he opened three bottles for our first tasting session. Taking my glass of Chassagne-Montrachet and listening to Pascal talk enthusiastically about tastes, producers, labels and all things vinous, I felt that I was about to get a privileged look into one of the world's most famous wine-producing regions.

I was part of the three-day wine academy that passengers can take as an optional extra during week-long cruises in Burgundy operated by Belmond Afloat in France. Our boat, the twin-deck *Belmond Amaryllis*, was moored in the town of Chalon-sur-Saône, where our waterway journey had begun earlier that day. This *péniche-hôtel*, as they are

known, carries a maximum of eight passengers and has a crew of six (skipper, matelot, two hostesses, chef and tour guide), who welcomed us aboard. The hotel tag is no misnomer: the 'cabins' are large, en-suite bedrooms, and the boat also has a lounge, separate dining room and a pool on the sun deck.

Within minutes of departure, the *Amaryllis* turned off the busy River Saône to enter the Canal du Centre, which links up with the River Loire 112 kilometres to the south-west. The waterway can't take large river cruisers but is just wide and deep enough for the *Amaryllis*. After negotiating an incongruously high lock, we entered a peaceful new world, passing the occasional hamlet – where the waving inhabitants seemed happy enough to have a 38-metre-long boat sailing past the bottom of their garden – before reaching our mooring at Fragnes.

After our induction into the academy that evening, we settled in for dinner around one long table. Pascal left the wine pouring and talking duties to the barge's guide Andrew as we enjoyed our four-course gastronomic meal. The following day's main visit was not taking place until the afternoon, which left us the morning to enjoy the boat's meander along the canal. The *Amaryllis* does about 5km/h, a pace so sedate that it is easy to hop off ➤



FROM TOP: The *Amaryllis*'s matelot Paul prepares to moor the boat; Tutor Pascal Wagner in full flow at the Château de Pommard tasting



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: The dining room on the Amaryllis set for the evening meal; A wine-tasting lunch at La Table d'Olivier in Puligny-Montrachet; The courtyard of the Château de Pommard; Pascal Wagner and vigneron Olivier Leflaive outside La Table d'Olivier



at a lock and stroll along the towpath or take one of the on-board bicycles and rejoin the boat later.

On this bright spring day, the sounds of nature were interrupted only by the occasional ‘attention’ from cycling enthusiasts riding past me at a speed that I couldn’t hope to match – even if I had wanted to.

After my brief exercise, the boat moored just outside the town of Chagny in time for an on-board buffet lunch (with wine, of course). It set us up nicely for a trip in the boat’s accompanying minibus to the Château de Pommard, a *domaine* in the Côte de Beaune notable for concentrating on red wines in an area renowned for its whites. Here, off the main courtyard, in a stone, vaulted room unlike any classroom I had experienced, Pascal laid out his

teaching materials: a clip chart and bottles for tasting. We learned about the east/south-east facing slopes that catch the sun, the hundreds of small producers, the climate, the soil and the *terroir* – the almost mystical concept that the other components help to create.

Glasses at the ready, we were next given a lesson in how to drink wine, which turned out to be more complicated than I had imagined: pour a small amount into the glass, breathe in the aromas, take a sip, ‘eat’ the wine as if you were biting into an apple and then swallow, all in a continuous motion. My first attempt led to a lot of spluttering because I had taken too large a mouthful, but I soon got the idea and the results were impressive, as the earthy flavours lingered long in my mouth.

One advantage of a mobile academy is that the field trips are easy: this one involved a mere 100-yard stroll to the vineyards. Here, in an estate of just 20 hectares lie five *clos* or walled parcels of land, all planted with pinot noir – the only grape allowed in red burgundy – but each producing wine with its own characteristics, which are then blended to produce the *domaine*’s wines. For the geologically inclined, samples in glass vessels in the nearby archway show the differences between the five soils.

SAME
PLACE,
DIFFERENT
PACE

Pedal your way through Burgundy's vineyards

Cycling through some of the most famous vineyards in the world was an enjoyable part of our trip and if you want to make that the main focus of a wine-themed holiday, there are plenty of options. *Bourgogne à Vélo* (www.burgundy-by-bike.com) comprises 800 kilometres of signposted routes divided into five sections. One of them, the 37km *Voie des Vignes*, runs from Beaune, the wine capital of Burgundy, to the medieval town of Nolay via the spa town of Santenay and passes through the villages of Meursault and Pommard. Guided cycle tours are also available; *Bourgogne Évasion* (tel: (Fr) 6 64 68 83 57, www.bourgogne-evasion.fr) has a 10km half-day ride through the Côte de Beaune for €32 including a vineyard visit and tasting. If you want to combine cycling with fine dining and quality accommodation, *Cycling for Softies* (tel: 0161 248 8282, www.cycling-for-softies.co.uk) has self-guided itineraries in Burgundy that include luggage transfers between hotels.



{ The artisan producer's crémant had greater depth and more bubbles }

Apparently, it's the result of the Mont Blanc Massif pushing up the Burgundy *côtes* millions of years ago and disturbing the soil layers so they lie vertically rather than horizontally. Leaving the estate, we got a closer look at the vineyards as we rode along the narrow roads to the next village on the bikes that had been carried in the minibus.

Our wine education was extended even further on the boat that evening when Pascal introduced us to Burgundy's sparkling wine, the *crémant de Bourgogne*. It is made by what used to be called the *méthode champenoise*, but the wine growers in Champagne took offence at their name being taken in vain, so it's now *méthode traditionnelle*. In a comparative tasting, we tried a mass-produced bottle costing €6 and a bottle from an artisan producer, which had far greater depth of flavour and more bubbles for a couple of euros more.

There's more than one way to appreciate the Burgundy landscape, which was why at 7.30am the following morning I found myself making my debut flight in a hot-air balloon – an optional extra on the cruise. It was a crisp, sunny morning with a light northerly wind and the countryside looked a treat as we coasted over vineyards, fields and the occasional surprised resident coming out of their front door to see us passing just above their house. The balloon flew quite low, nudging upwards to pass over the

highest trees, and the 90-minute trip passed quickly, even for me with my fear of heights.

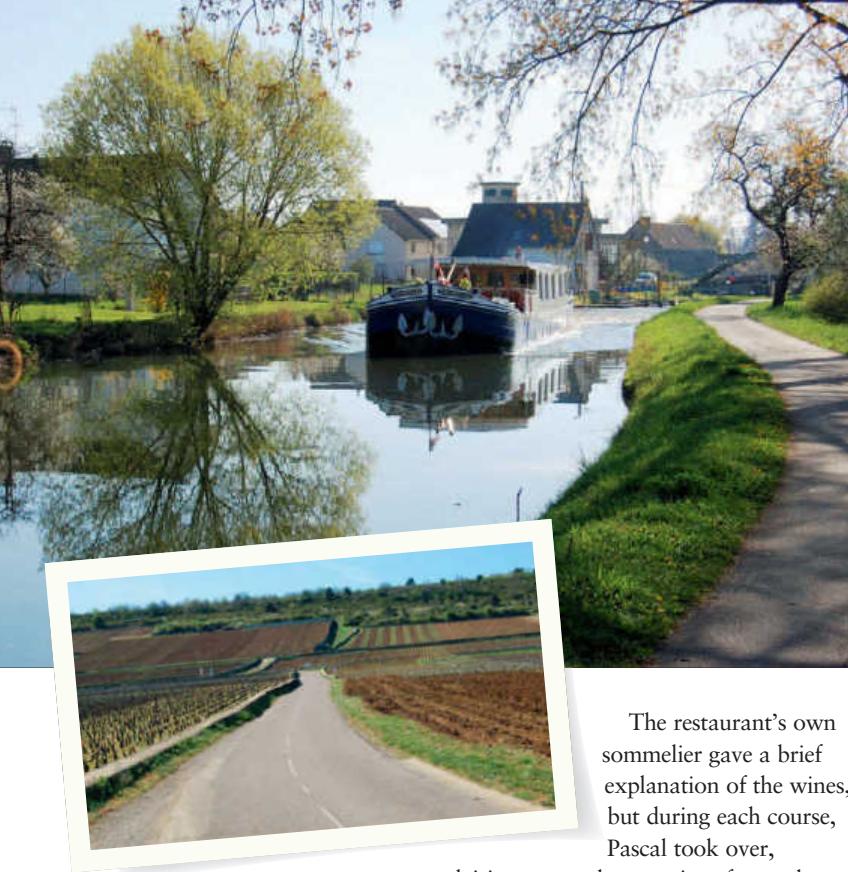
After landing the basket in a lush meadow, the pilot Vincent Dupuis packed away the canopy and then told us it was time for a *crémant*. He laid out a folding table, complete with tablecloth, and cracked open a bottle “to celebrate our survival”, which I think was a joke. It was 9am and the early start meant we hadn't yet eaten breakfast, so that was a heady experience.

The usual lavish breakfast spread was waiting back on the boat and we continued our journey for a short way, before mooring in preparation for a visit to the village of Puligny-Montrachet, the “greatest white wine commune in the world”, according to Master of Wine Clive Coates. Montrachet means ‘barren mountain’, not exactly a romantic phrase but, as Pascal explained, one that hinted at the wines’ quality; it means there are slopes, and the stony soil provides good drainage, so the vines have to work harder to reach the water.

A lunch and wine-tasting had been arranged at the restaurant run by Olivier Leflaive, one of the biggest names in Burgundy wine production. Pascal was once his sommelier and lives in the village, which gave our party a special entrée. The fixed four-course meal acts as a foil for the wines, and the rows of glasses before us heralded what was to come. Over the next three hours we sampled 11 wines, starting with an aperitif costing €15 a bottle and rising steadily in quality to a heavyweight *Grand Cru* at €95. It seemed almost sacrilegious to pour away wine into the bowl after each tasting but it had to be done to keep a clear head. ➤

ABOVE: The *Amaryllis* on the Canal du Centre between Chalon-sur-Saône and Fragnes;
BELLOW: A sample showing the different soil layers in one plot at the Château de Pommard





FROM TOP: The *Amaryllis* wends its way between Fragnes and Chagny; Vineyards outside Puligny-Montrachet, from the humble village appellation to Grands Crus

advising us to take two sips after each mouthful of food – the first for the brain to recognise the wine and the second to fully appreciate its flavour. Questions flowed with the wine and a query about how long a vintage can be kept led Pascal to grab a menu card and scribble a diagram explaining the ageing process of different wines – complete with a final cross to mark its death!

By now it was mid-afternoon and the sun was shining on the pretty square as we left the restaurant for the vineyards, which start at the edge of the

village and spread out in all directions as far as the eye can see. A few white vans were dotted about and their owners were busy tending their plots, which on this April day were just springing into life.

We had learned the previous day how Burgundy villages' vineyards began on the flat and then rose up the slopes to the ridge, with the 'magic level' for quality being around 250 metres. Now we were getting a practical demonstration. To the untrained eye, all the vineyards looked the same, but Pascal, arms outstretched, pointed to neighbouring plots – one a humble village *appellation* and the other a stellar *Grand Cru* lying further up the slope.

My map of the village didn't bother with street names but did list all the vineyards – more than 50 of them spread over 230 hectares – and Pascal weaved an entertaining (and possibly true) story of how three adjoining plots came to be called *chevalier* (lord), *les pucelles* (virgins) and *bâtarde*.

Back at the boat the wine academy came to a close with a dinner and more fine burgundies. Interestingly, I was not suffering wine fatigue (or a sore head) and some of the lessons I had learned helped to explain why. The quality of the wine had a lot to do with it, but there was more: the small measures (no 250ml glasses here); matching wines with food; and savouring every mouthful rather than 'pouring it down your throat', as Pascal put it.

Lingering over a final glass, I knew that my initial feelings had been right. This was an academy that didn't set exams or award certificates; but it had been an education. ☺

Francofile

Learn about fine wines on a Burgundy cruise

GETTING AROUND

Simon travelled with Belmond Afloat in France, which operates five *péniche-hôtels* in France. Prices in 2016 for a private charter aboard *Belmond Amaryllis* start from £33,200 based on eight passengers, including private transfers from Paris to the barge and back, six nights' accommodation, meals and drinks on board, private sightseeing and local transfers. All five boats are available for private hire with some also available on a per cabin basis. Tel: 0845 077 2222, www.belmond.com

THE WINE ACADEMY

The Wine Academy is available on Belmond's three *péniche-hôtels*

operating in Burgundy: the *Amaryllis*, *Hirondelle* and *Fleur de Lys*. Activities take place on three days of the six-night cruise. Prices start from an additional £700 per person based on four people in a group (the minimum recommended for the wine academy). Belmond offers two *Grand Cru* tastings – one in the Côte de Beaune (Olivier Leflaive) and one in the Côte de Nuits (Domaine Trapet); visits with Pascal Wagner to the vineyards and to Château de Pommard; a cellar visit in Beaune and at the Château du Clos de Vougeot; and a market tour in Dijon. Itineraries can be tailored to suit passengers' interests. The balloon flight is separate and costs £180pp.

WHERE TO VISIT

Château de Pommard
15 Rue Marey Monge
21630 Pommard
Tel: (Fr) 3 80 22 12 59
www.chateaudepommard.com
The 20-hectare *domaine* actually consists of two châteaux (the second is tucked away behind one of the *clos*) and has both an English and a French garden, as well as a courtyard displaying works of art. In addition to wine tasting, visitors can also see the cellars, a museum and a replica of an 18th-century kitchen, complete with rotating spit.

La Table d'Olivier

10 Place du Monument
21190 Puligny-Montrachet

Tel: (Fr) 3 80 21 37 65
www.olivier-leflaive.com
Olivier Leflaive has now retired but is still a visible presence at his restaurant, which is open at lunchtimes and in the evenings (except Sunday) for the meal and accompanying wine-tasting. Independent travellers can stay in the adjoining four-star hotel.



TOURIST INFORMATION: Beaune tourist office, tel: (Fr) 3 80 26 21 30, www.beaune-tourism.com; Burgundy tourist board, www.burgundy-tourism.com

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The historical region of le Bugey inspired Brillat-Savarin to write one of the world's most famous books on gastronomy. As **Ray Kershaw** discovers, the area is a feast for the eyes as well as the stomach

MAIN PICTURE: The town of Belley, capital of the Bugey region;
INSET: Its most famous son, Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin

Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, the jolly judge credited as the father of gastronomy, could only have come from le Bugey, a rugged, far-flung historical region east of Lyon. Countless dishes and a cheese have been created in his honour. His writings on food – never out of print since 1825 – changed conceptions of eating from merely a way to fuel up into a joyful philosophy of life. Most famous are his aphorisms, carved as indelibly into culinary culture as the Ten Commandments were into stone.

"Tell me what you eat and I'll tell what you are" (aphorism IV). As I study Brillat-Savarin's statue in his home town of Belley, his face offers few clues to what the answer would tell about him. A kindly man of substance? The bijou town's one-time mayor? Yet no one added more to the planet's *joie de vivre*, his love of lavish feasts transmuting self-indulgence into a civilising art. Is that, after all, a twinkle in his eye?

Bobbing like a wine cork on the billows of France's most turbulent times, the extraordinary man from an extraordinary



region kept himself buoyant with the choicest dishes that creation could cook up. His passion for life was expanded to a science of what makes human beings human, spiced with golden rules for facing fate's vicissitudes. *"The discovery of a new dish does more for human happiness than the discovery of a new star"* (aphorism IX).

Born in 1755 at 62 La Grande Rue, Brillat-Savarin – fluent in seven languages, author, politician, appeal court judge, archaeologist, historian, virtuoso violinist, composer and philosopher – would be astonished that the work concocted mostly as a pastime remains the gourmet's bible after 200 years. The *Physiologie du Goût* (*The Physiology of Taste*) is not a cookery book but an inspirational paean to food, whether country kitchen or sumptuously refined. *"Life alone gives the universe existence; all that lives must eat"* (aphorism I).

The eclectic Gallic banquet offers as hors d'oeuvres 20 pithy aphorisms, followed by the 30 rib-sticking essays that ➤





he called ‘meditations’, which exuberantly ramble from frying, dying and the end of the world to the erotic power of truffles. “*Just saying the word ‘truffle’ stirs erotic memories in both the skirt-wearing sex and the sex that wears beards*” (from meditation VI).

He did like his truffles: truffles with everything and from anywhere, but his favourites were the local ‘black diamonds’ of le Bugey. A gentleman by birth, republican by nature, he was by turns a revolutionary, Napoleonist and equivocal royalist. Above all, he was a patriot of le Bugey, whose identity and culture he championed all his life. “*A hare killed near Paris makes an insignificant dish; one from le Bugey’s Valromey is the most aromatic quadruped of all*” (from meditation VI).

The once semi-autonomous Savoyard province was ceded to France in 1601. With its spectacular mountains, deep river gorges, waterfalls and lakes, heart-stealing villages, ancient castles and abbeys, the latecomer resembles a tourist brochure microcosm of the nation it joined. You don’t pass through le Bugey – all the main roads lead around it – you have to want to go. Even today few fully fledged *citoyens* could find this self-contained and self-sufficient area on a map.

This was the father of gastronomy’s personal land of milk and honey. The game and cep-rich forests, lush meadows and high pastures; their milk, cream and cheeses; their poultry, lamb and beef; wines from grape varieties planted by the Romans – all run like a shining subtext behind every word he wrote. He lyrically called it “an English kitchen garden 20 leagues square”.

One of its jewels is Lac de Nantua – source of the classic

{ Reflected in the shimmering water, the auberge looks more mirage-like than real

Nantua crayfish sauce – from where the road spirals steeply into Haut-Bugey’s forests. Spick-and-span mountain villages and happy-looking dairy cows tell of the proximity to Switzerland. In a luminous clearing to the north-east of Nantua, my wife Alice and I discover the Auberge du Lac Génin. Reflected in the shimmering water it looks more mirage-like than real. Dragonflies flash; purple saffron crocuses speckle the banks; jumping fish seem to be queuing to be caught. The inn has three large bedrooms. The tranquillity is total; owls croon us to sleep. Yet even if our hideaway had been only half as idyllic we would have come just for the roasts.

The Godet family, master *rôtisseurs* for three generations, roast or grill their meat over the dining room’s gargantuan log fire. “*Cooking is learned; rôtisseurs are born*” (aphorism XV). Made in the gourmet guru’s honour, the Godets’ incomparable Haut-Bugey fondues draw Swiss tourists from Geneva. Fondue was one of the few dishes that Brillat-Savarin cooked for himself. His recipe ends with this stirring advice: “Serve with copious good wine and one will witness wonders!”

The Bugey heartland is severed from Haut-Bugey by the plunging Sylans Gorge. Today traversed by motorway viaducts, the torrents below remain as formidable as in 1794 when the



corpulent judge, evading the guillotine, scrambled along them into a three-year exile in the infant USA. His campaigns to keep le Bugey strong in the new Ain *département* had bravely challenged the revolutionary fervour of Robespierre.

Fortunately, he had remembered to pack his Stradivarius, which meant he wouldn't starve. His bonus was turkey – “the New World's best gift to the Old” – but he missed his Bugey wines such as the “thousand-bubble rosés” of the Cerdon Valley.

The sunny vineyards, scaling the steep cliffs of the dazzling limestone amphitheatre, gild a landscape as seductive as their age-old wines. Pressed from gamay and the hidden valley's rare poulsard grapes, Cerdon's *méthodes ancestrales* acquire their aromatic fizz from ancient Bugey alchemies probably predating champagne's. With less than eight per cent alcohol, their just-picked fruitiness is sealed into every bubble.

Cerdon itself, its medieval lanes adorned with rose-wreathed fountains, reposes like a Sleeping Beauty awaiting just a prince's kiss – or perhaps a *FRANCE Magazine* feature – to bring her international fame. Beneath the valley's terminal precipice twist the glittering caverns of the Grottes du Cerdon. In the cathedral-sized Grande Salle, Bugey cheeses were made from the Middle Ages until 1959.

On the Plateau d'Hauteville we find cheeses by the score in the village of Aranc. The vine-hung *fromagerie* has been making goat's cheese since the great gastronome's day but it's an *affineur* too of every sort of Bugey cheese.

At the Hôtel Évasion, chef Pascal is a wizard with *grenouilles*, although wildlife laws mean the frogs are no longer locally caught. Like a mission statement, the menu cover reads: “*The pleasure of the table belongs to every age, every social station, every land and every day; it blends with every other pleasure and remains to console us when all the others are eventually lost*” (*aphorism VII*).

Good music for the gourmet was as vital as good food. In nearby Ambronay, an annual music festival in the riverside setting of its 9th-century abbey would have thrilled Brillat-Savarin's *bugiste* heart. We are enraptured by a great Handel oratorio in the magnificent church where Jean-Anthelme, the teenage violinist, performed the composer's works, too. ➤

CLOCKWISE FROM FACING PAGE: The town of Cerdon lies in a picturesque valley; The rotisserie is the centrepiece of the dining room at the Auberge du Lac Génin; A tranquil spot beside the lake outside the auberge; The fromagerie in Aranc has been making cheese since Brillat-Savarin's time

In the grounds there is a garden party atmosphere: music for everyone, rock to baroque. As well as playing Handel, he liked composing risqué songs. “*I observe with pride that coquetry and gourmandism, the two major civilisers of our most imperious needs, both come from France*” (from meditation XI). After a penurious start in New York, he made a good living playing violin in the continent’s first concert orchestra.

At the Michelin-starred Auberge de l’Abbaye, chef Ivan Lavaux presents his five-course *menu dégustation*. The accompanying wines ascend to a luscious *vendange tardive* (late harvest) – can it truly be le Bugey? Jean-Anthelme believed that the region could do everything better than anywhere else in France. We’re not about to disagree.

The drive from Ambronay to Belley must be among the most spectacular in France, with castle-topped cliffs overhanging gorge-hugged villages. Le Bugey’s capital has 9,000 inhabitants and everything you need: theatre, cinema, parks and fountained squares, plus enough historic buildings – 12th-century cathedral, episcopal palace, Renaissance law court and Roman remains – to make the reputations of cities ten times its size.

It is also inescapable that Belley loves food. There seem to be more butchers, bakers, *pâtisseries* and restaurants per capita than anywhere we’ve been. In Le Temporal restaurant we cannot resist the *plat du jour*: fillet of *lavaret*, a rare deep-water species from Lac du Bourget – the fish he most enjoyed.

{ The original *bon vivant* knew what made life worth living: good food, good wine, good company

Until he was 12, his mother educated him. She was a famous cook, known as *La Belle Aurore*. Some of her creations remain culinary classics, such as *oreiller de la Belle Aurore*, rich game pies crammed with le Bugey truffles. Later he attended the prestigious Belley College, studied law in Dijon and settled down for life as a prosperous barrister in his home town. He reluctantly left, aged 34, in 1789 when elected to the new Revolutionary Assembly in the perilous role of le Bugey’s man in Paris. He didn’t think much of Île-de-France food, but liked the new-fangled ‘restaurants’ set up by cooks thrown out of work after the executions of their aristocratic employers. You can still occupy his seat in the Palais-Royal’s two-star Grand Véfour restaurant. “*Of those who crowd restaurants, few understand that restaurateurs must be men of genius... a restaurant is a gourmand’s Eden*” (from meditation XXVIII).

Regimes rotated swiftly: Robespierre, Napoléon, Louis XVIII, Napoléon again and another round of Louis. Jean-Anthelme’s allegiances rotated equally fast. Napoléon awarded him one of the first *Légions d’honneur*. As a judge, as Belley’s mayor, as a clever legislator, the original *bon vivant* kept a sense of proportion about what made life worth living: good food, good wine, good company. “*There’s no pleasure if the wine is bad, guests chosen without care, their expressions sad or the meal consumed too quickly*” (from meditation XIV).

His favourite retreat was his manor at Vieu, a hamlet near his vineyards in the glorious Valromey area north of Belley.



ABOVE: An illuminated fountain in Place des Terreaux in Belley

He loved to help out at every *vendange*. The Valley of the Romans, its woodlands, meadows and waterfall-filled nooks, still feels a world apart within the world apart of le Bugey itself. Here he dug for truffles and Roman remains. In Vieu’s picturesque church, one of France’s oldest, we discover the agnostic’s personal pew.

Above everything towers the Grand Colombier mountain where he hunted and rode until the end of his life. Seen from the summit, Mont Blanc seems near enough to touch. Far below, we can track the Upper Rhône looping around le Bugey’s best vineyards.

Of all the wines of France – and he certainly tried most: “If I’d included drinks, the book would never end” – his own Manicle and Côte Grell were the ones that he treasured. Destroyed by the phylloxera bug in the late 19th century, they became le Bugey legends. Two centuries on, like the childless author’s only living descendants, they have been lovingly revived.

At the Caveau Bugiste, in the beautiful *village fleuri* of Vongnes, we taste Manicle de la Truffière and Machuraz from Côte Grell, both part of the Vin du Bugey *appellation* created in 2009. The Caveau’s motto enjoins: “*Inviting guests means ensuring their happiness while they’re under your roof*” (aphorism XX).

The *Physiologie du Goût*, by ‘A Professor’, was published late in 1825. It was an instant success. Two months later Brillat-Savarin was dead at the age of 70. Compared with his legal tomes, he thought *Le Goût* was “somewhat slight”, yet his life’s postscript has become the universal gospel of the *art de vivre*. To le Bugey’s chefs he is like a patron saint.

At La Fine Fourchette restaurant in Virignin we share the view across the Rhône to mountain-ringed Belley with a bust of the professor of gastronomy. Although he is buried in Paris, we now know where his soul resides. As we are mouth-wateringly challenged by sweetbreads in wine, Bugey lamb cutlets and 12 local cheeses, we try to exemplify his meditation on obesity, “it demands great character to leave the table hungry”. We fall at the last hurdle – a *pain perdu* of pure genius. He doesn’t seem too disapproving. “*Following a good meal both body and soul enjoy exceptional well-being*” (meditation XIV). Raising our glasses, we affirm his observation. He might easily have added “especially when you’re somewhere in le Bugey.” ☺ Turn to page 68 for travel information. ➤

LE BUGEY



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The village of Saint-Rambert-en-Bugey on the spectacular drive between Ambronay and Belley; Brillat-Savarin's mansion at Vieu; The Caveau Bugiste winery in the *village fleuri* of Vongnes; A view of the Grand Colombier mountain from the Valromey; Ivan Lavaux and fellow chef Jérôme Busset at the Auberge de l'Abbaye in Ambronay

Francofile

Explore the gastronomic paradise of le Bugey



GETTING THERE

By road: Ray travelled on P&O's Hull/Zeebrugge overnight ferry, a handy shortcut to France from Scotland and the north of England. Le Bugey is around seven hours' drive from the northern Channel ports (tel: 0871 664 2121, www.poferries.com).

By rail: The direct service from London to Lyon takes 4hr 45min; it's then a 50min journey to Virieu-le-Grand-Belley, where there is a bus connection to Belley.

By air: The nearest airport is Lyon Saint-Exupéry.

WHERE TO STAY

Auberge du Lac Génin

01130 Charix
Tel: (Fr) 4 74 75 52 50
www.lacgenin.fr
Perfect tranquillity by a forest-enclosed lake at 900 metres altitude, with forest walks (maps supplied), fishing, mountain biking and winter sports nearby. The three charming suites need booking far ahead; doubles €65, breakfast €6.50.

Hôtel-Restaurant Aranc Évasion

Place du Lavoir
01110 Aranc
Tel: (Fr) 4 74 38 57 79
www.aranc-evasion.com
Flower-festooned hotel (*pictured*) in the heart of a tiny village. Doubles, some with balconies, €60, breakfast €8.50.

Au Saint Jean

92 Rue Saint-Jean
01300 Belley
Tel: (Fr) 4 79 81 55 27
www.ausaintjean.com



Boules players in front of the Hôtel-Restaurant Aranc Évasion

Chambre d'hôtes in the centre of town with five en-suite rooms overlooking a garden. Doubles from €70 including breakfast.

Le Clos de Luthézieu

01260 Belmont-Luthézieu
Tel: (Fr) 4 79 87 69 48
www.gites-de-france-charme.com/fiche-01G36501.html
Three-bedroom *chambre d'hôtes* in an 18th-century manor house situated in its own park high above the Valromey with glorious views of the Grand Colombier mountain. Owners Sylvie and Xavier Roy make you feel like family. Doubles €105.

FOR AN APÉRO

Le Café Neuf

10 Place des Terreaux
01300 Belley
Tel: (Fr) 4 79 81 02 35
Cheerful café and brasserie with a pretty covered terrace at Belley's busy floral hub. Also serves good-value meals.

WHERE TO EAT

Restaurant l'Auberge de l'Abbaye

47 Place des Anciens Combattants
01500 Ambronay
Tel: (Fr) 4 74 46 42 54
www.aubergedelabbaye-ambronay.com
Michelin-starred restaurant in an atmospheric location, with room for just 26 diners. Set gastronomic menus from €50 (from €84 with wines), lunch menu €34, booking essential.

Auberge de la Fine Fourchette

RD 1504 - Les Routes
01300 Virignin
Tel: (Fr) 4 79 81 59 33
www.aubergedelafinefourchette.fr
In a beautiful garden setting overlooking the River Rhône, Michelin-listed chef Guy Delouille serves superb 'real-food' menus in Brillat-Savarin-sized portions with a fine Bugey wine list to match. Menus from €29.

Restaurant

Le Temporel

18 bis Rue Saint-Martin
01300 Belley
Tel: (Fr) 4 79 81 46 73
Two young chefs inspired by Brillat-Savarin – everything comes from le Bugey – work magic in a historic, newly renovated house. The lunchtime *plat du jour* is always something special. Menus from €17.

WHERE TO VISIT

Les Grottes du Cerdon

01450 Labalme
Tel: (Fr) 4 74 37 36 79
www.grotte-cerdon.com

Tour one of the best show caves in France and marvel at the Grande Salle cavern with its window to the sky, which has been known since Neolithic times. The view down the Cerdon Valley is breathtaking. Children and grown-ups can learn more about prehistoric times through a series of activities in the park.

L'Abbaye d'Ambronay

Place de l'Abbaye
01500 Ambronay
Tel: (Fr) 4 74 38 74 00
www.ambronay.org
The exquisite 9th-century abbey is now a cultural centre with daily guided tours. The annual music festival – ranging from baroque to rock – is being held from 11 Sept-4 Oct.

Le Caveau Bugiste

326 Rue de la Vigne du Bois
01350 Vongnes
Tel: (Fr) 4 79 87 92 32
www.caveau-bugiste.fr
This winery is an enjoyable spot to taste and buy most kinds of le Bugey wine.

Cellier Lingot-Martin

Sous la Côte Ménestrel
01450 Poncin
Tel: (Fr) 4 74 39 97 77
www.lingot-martin.fr
At the foot of the Cerdon Valley, this is the place to taste and buy the local *méthodes ancestrales* sparkling wines.

BOOKS

La Physiologie du Goût (Flammarion) is available from French bookshops and online. It is published in English by Vintage as *Physiology of Taste* in a translation by food writer M. F. K. Fisher.



Brillat-Savarin - The Judge and his Stomach, by Giles MacDonogh (published by John Murray) is the only biography in English.



TOURIST INFORMATION: Belley Bugey Sud tourist board, tel: (Fr) 4 79 81 29 06, www.bugeysud-tourisme.fr; Ain tourist board, tel: (Fr) 4 74 32 31 30, www.ain-tourisme.com

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Take a stroll in... Beuvron-en-Auge

This *Plus Beau Village* in the lush Normandy countryside had an unlikely modern-day ally when it came to restoring its medieval good looks, as **Paul Bloomfield** discovers



It's a wonderful paradox that arguably Normandy's loveliest village owes its beauty to a motorway. Gazing admiringly at the timbered houses lining the flower-decked market square, where I'm relaxing with a leisurely morning coffee, it's hard to reconcile the arrival of a concrete ribbon with the preservation of this *Plus Beau Village*. Yet without the construction of the nearby A13, Beuvron-en-Auge might have become just another victim of modernity.

Beuvron is the poster child for the Pays d'Auge, a verdant swathe of cows, cider and cheese that could reasonably be labelled the Cotswolds of Normandy. Stretching south from the Côte Fleurie of Calvados into the Orne *département*, its half-timbered villages and rolling countryside attract waves of weekend visitors. The 200-soul hamlet of Beuvron is the honeypot that draws the most, lured not just by the picturesque cottages but also by its gastronomic reputation.

That being the case, the best person to expand on the village's history is Jérôme Bansard, chef of Le Pavé d'Auge, the renowned restaurant that sits in the middle of the market square – and the perfect example of how Beuvron was rescued.

"It looks very old," Jérôme says with a smile as he waves at the dark wood beams and low roof, "and in a way it is. The materials are mostly taken from ancient buildings – but the restaurant was only built here in 1975."

Tanning and weaving

That story is echoed as we amble around, pausing to admire handsome old houses, some dating from the 15th century, when the village first burgeoned. The *Vieux Manoir* is of that vintage. The turreted, riverside landmark isn't open to the public, though its exterior is worth studying, particularly the carved timbers flanking its windows – look out in particular for the Norman warrior.

Within a couple of centuries the village had become a bustling centre for tanning and weaving, Jérôme tells me as we squeak through the narrow Rue de la Catouillette to the tightly packed houses of the former weavers' quarter. By the 19th century Beuvron was a hub for livestock trading, boosted by the arrival of the railway in 1879. But when the station ➤



LEFT: Some of the restored half-timbered buildings in Beuvron-en-Auge;
ABOVE: Jérôme Bansard, chef of Le Pavé d'Auge restaurant

closed in the second half of the 20th century, prosperity and population dwindled. By 1970, it was a ghost of its former self; ugly modern façades masking those historic buildings.

But when the A13 from Paris to Caen came bulldozing through, the then-mayor Michel Vermughen saw an opportunity. He pushed to acquire materials from houses and cottages demolished during the motorway's construction, and obtain funding to restore the beauty of Beuvron – including the building of what is now Le Pavé d'Auge, on the square which has been renamed in his honour.

There are plenty more opportunities for tasting local produce: hand-painted signs at farm gates advertise cheese, cider and honey, while the shelves at the tempting Épicerie shop are groaning with the best Calvados apple brandy, cheeses, caramels and more.

At dusk, after the day-trippers have gone and the shops reverse their *ouvert/fermé* signs, I take a final stroll. I can just make out a ripple of laughter from the café-tabac, but otherwise a blissful serenity reigns. Even the calls of the swifts swooping overhead seem more genteel than at home. Motorway and Michel, I salute you.

BEUVRON-EN-AUGE AT A GLANCE

Stay the night at... Le Pavé d'Hôtes (tel: (Fr) 2 31 39 39 10, www.pavedauge.com), a delightful B&B run by the people behind Le Pavé d'Auge restaurant. The building, at the northern fringes of the village opposite the church, is carved out of a typical Pays d'Auge farmhouse dating from 1789. The result effortlessly blends historical character with modern comforts. Doubles from €88.

... Le Clos Fleuri (tel: (Fr) 2 31 39 00 62, www.leclosfleuri-14.fr) is a *chambre d'hôtes* in another charming house, opposite the *Vieux Manoir*, and is accessed through a lilac-clad courtyard. Doubles €70.

Stop for a drink at... Café du Coiffeur (tel: (Fr) 2 31 79 25 62). No, it isn't a hairdresser's – despite the decor and name. Sitting pretty at the corner of the main square, the café (*pictured*) is the ideal venue for a coffee or a glass of local cider (€2.10). Grab a morsel of Viennoiserie from the *boulangerie* across the square and settle in for a spot of sipping and people-watching.



GETTING THERE: The nearest airports are Deauville and Caen (both around 40km). Caen's Ouistreham port (32km) is served by Brittany Ferries (tel: 0871 244 1400, www.brittany-ferries.co.uk). The nearest railway station is

Eat lunch at... Le Pavé d'Auge (tel: (Fr) 2 31 79 26 71, www.pavedauge.com), Jérôme Bansard's Michelin-starred restaurant. This is the place for a splurge, with exquisitely playful takes on local flavours. Menus from €39. Its sister restaurant Café Forges (tel: (Fr) 2 31 74 01 78, www.cafeforges.fr) is a characterful bistro opposite Le Pavé, where meat is cooked over an open wood fire in the old forge. Menu from €19.

WHAT TO SEE

- Watch artists and artisans at work in the Espace Métiers d'Art (tel: (Fr) 2 31 26 19 86), a cluster of workshops set around a courtyard in a former school in Avenue de la Gare. Products range



from ceramics and jewellery to books, leatherwork and hand-crafted furniture.

- Don't be put off by the plain frontage of the Église Saint-Martin: the brickwork masks a 17th-century edifice built using materials from an older church that stood near the (now obliterated) castle. Admire the late 19th- and early 20th-century stained-glass windows and a curious 18th-century painted wood statue of the Virgin and Child.

- The 12th-century Chapelle Saint-Michel de Clermont-en-Auge is a pleasant two-kilometre stroll north of the village centre and occupies a hilltop site with far-reaching views. The main draws are the 15th-century statues of Saint Michael and John the Baptist.

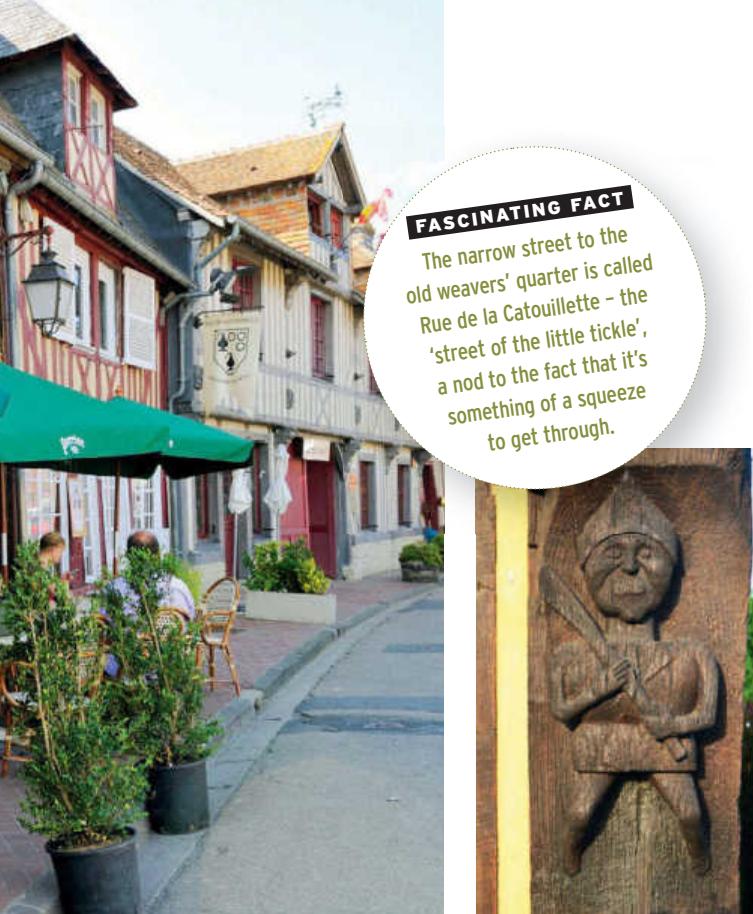
- Visit Beuvron on the first Sunday in May for the *Foire aux Géraniums*, which clads the main square in rainbow hues with displays by horticulturalists, plantmen and flower-sellers, and live music. The last Sunday in October brings the *Fête du Cidre*, when the square hosts a large market of apple and cider producers.

at Lisieux (25km), a 1hr 45min journey from Paris Saint-Lazare.

TOURIST INFORMATION: Beuvron-en-Auge information centre, tel: (Fr) 2 31 39 59 14, www.beuvroncambremer.com; Calvados tourist board, tel: (Fr) 2 31 27 90 30, www.calvados-tourisme.co.uk



IN THE AREA



ABOVE, FROM LEFT:
Customers enjoy a drink in Beuvron's main square; A wood carving at the *Vieux Manoir*; **LEFT:** The exterior of the *Vieux Manoir*; **BELLOW:** Half-timbered shops in the main square



PHOTOGRAPHS: RENE MATTEI/HEMIS/FR: PAUL BLOOMFIELD

The area around Beuvron is quintessential Norman farming country: an undulating emerald carpet of orchards and dairy pastures speckled with timbered farmhouses.

The cows produce rich milk, so it's unsurprising that dairy products – cream, butter, *confiture de lait* ('milk jam', a caramel spread like *dulce de leche*) and cheese – are local specialities. The three big names of Pays d'Auge cheese come from the eponymous settlements of Pont-l'Évêque, Livarot and Camembert to the east of Beuvron. Production is mostly industrialised now, but there are plenty of artisan cheesemakers. Look out for the lesser-known Pavé d'Auge (after which Jérôme Bansard's restaurant is named).

Cider, Calvados and *pommeau* (made from sweet apple juice and Calvados) are other local favourites. With a car or bike you can follow the 40km signposted *Route du Cidre* to visit the best producers in the neighbouring countryside.

The Pays d'Auge has hundreds of half-timbered manor houses, each the seigneurial seat of a farming domain and some dating from the 14th century. One of the finest is the Manoir du Champ Versant (tel: (Fr) 2 31 65 11 07), just off the *Route du Cidre* at Bonnebosq. Visitors can explore the house, the

original bakery, coach house, sheepfold, wash house and distillery.

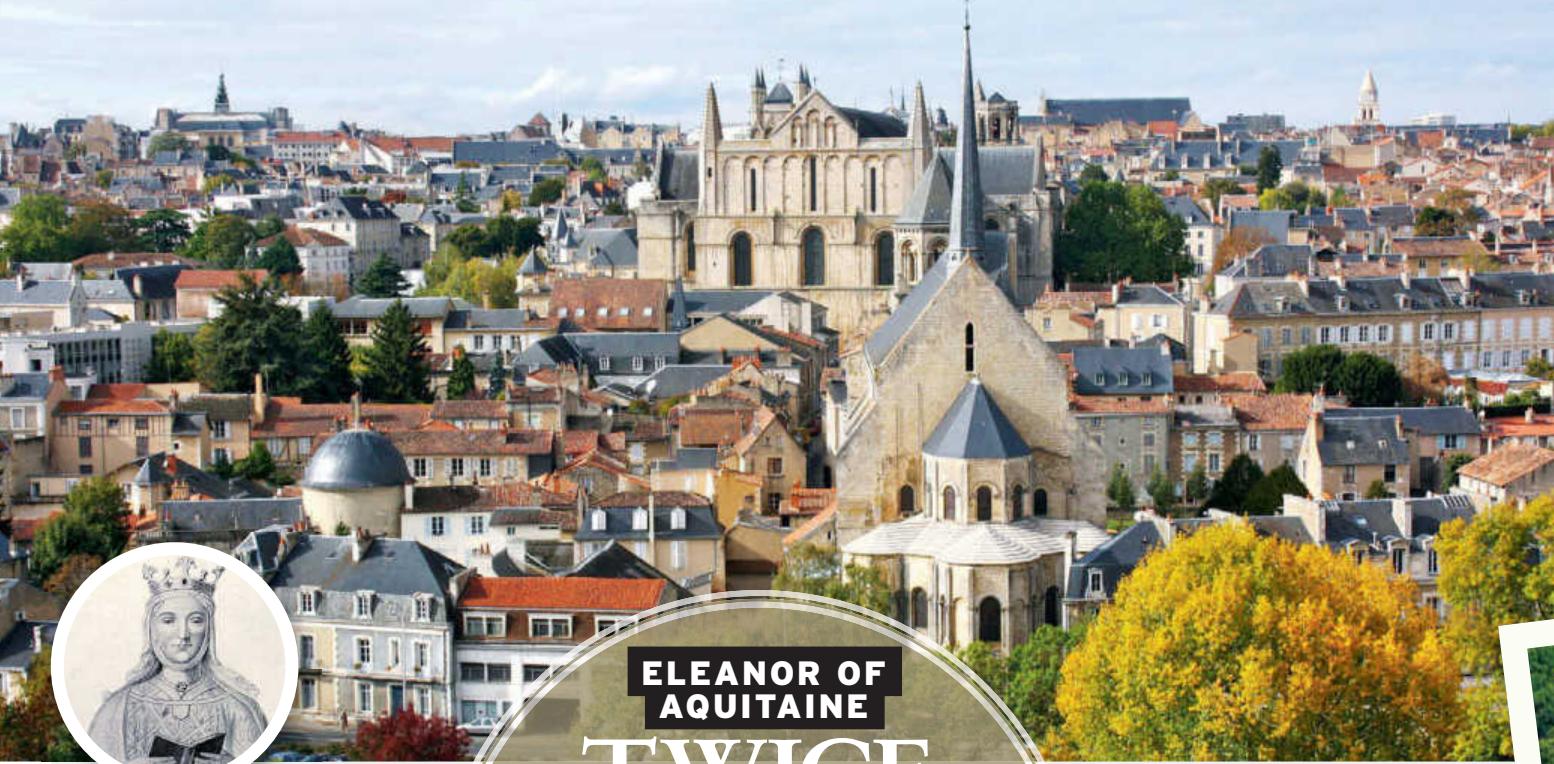
At the Château de Crèvecœur (*pictured below*), a moated medieval castle has been augmented by rescued farm buildings from the 15th and 16th centuries. Explore the farm, dovecote, barn, chapel and healing herb garden (tel: (Fr) 2 31 63 02 45, www.chateau-de-crevecoeur.com).

The Pays d'Auge is also famed for its horses; nearly half of France's thoroughbreds originate in the area. Groups can visit the stud at the Manoir de Sens (tel: (Fr) 2 31 79 23 05, www.manoirdesens.com/harasdesens.html) north-east of Beuvron to find out more about horse breeding.

A 20-minute drive brings you to the Côte Fleurie, which is studded with genteel resorts and historic ports. Cabourg is among the former, designed in semi-circles expanding out from the Grand Hôtel, where the writer Marcel Proust was a regular guest.

East across the river lies Dives-sur-Mer, from where William the Conqueror set sail to invade England in 1066. The medieval wooden market hall is noted as much for the delicacies on offer as the ancient oak structure itself. It is then a short drive to the chic resort of Deauville and to Honfleur, one of Normandy's most historic and picturesque ports.





Historians cannot be sure of the exact date, but Eleanor was born in Bordeaux around 1122. The eldest daughter of William X, Duke of Aquitaine, she was heiress to swathes of Aquitaine, Gascony and Poitou. Her father was an enthusiastic patron of the arts and Eleanor developed a passion for art, literature, poetry and music that was to influence her whole life.

When the Duke died in 1137, the teenage Eleanor became the Duchess of Aquitaine and the most eligible heiress in Europe. Vulnerable to kidnap and unscrupulous suitors, she was promptly married off by her guardian, Louis VI of France, to his 17-year-old son, Prince Louis. The couple were an unlikely match: Louis was pious and beholden to the church, while Eleanor was strong-minded, witty and worldly. She was renowned for her beauty and elegance, and was more likely to be found in the company of artists and musicians than priests and abbots.

Just a few days after their marriage, Louis succeeded to the throne with Eleanor as his queen. The love-struck king indulged her extravagant tastes and ordered expensive renovations to the Palais de la Cité in Paris to make it more comfortable for his wife and her entourage.

Louis, however, could not tame the restless Eleanor who, inspired by troubadours' tales of courtly love and

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE

TWICE A QUEEN

The influence of one of the Middle Ages' most powerful women can still be felt today, says **Kate Chappell**

derring-do, wanted adventure. She insisted on joining her husband on the Second Crusade to the Holy Land in 1147 to "help tend the wounded", albeit with 300 ladies-in-waiting and servants in tow. Unsurprisingly, her inappropriate cortège and disagreements with Louis pushed their already strained relationship to the limit. After the couple's return to France, their marriage was annulled in 1152 on the basis of consanguinity (they were distant blood relatives).

Within a matter of months, Eleanor married Henry Plantagenet, Count of Anjou, who was about 11 years her junior, grandson of Henry I of England and rival to her former husband. The ceremony took place in Poitiers Cathedral, but was a modest affair with none of the pomp and splendour of Eleanor's first wedding. In Henry she had met her match – the count was fiery, energetic and passionate in his quest to take the English throne for the Plantagenets.

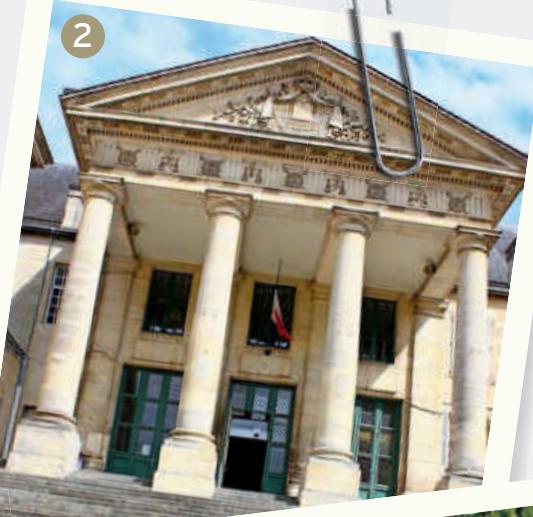
Eleanor's power in Europe was a boon to Henry's campaign and in 1154 he became Henry II of England. Eleanor was a queen once again.

Between them Henry and Eleanor created an impressive empire and a solid family line to the English throne – in just 13 years the queen bore Henry five sons and three daughters. True to form, Eleanor played a prominent part in government and also worked tirelessly to promote art, poetry and the Arthurian legends at the English court. She also introduced new ideas of chivalry and courtly love, diluting a heavily masculine society with the possibility that women were capable of independent thought and deserved to be cherished and respected, rather than oppressed.

Eleanor's forays into politics began to infuriate the king, however. She refused to hide her fierce support for her sons, Richard and John, and almost certainly encouraged them to rebel against their father. As a result, Henry ordered her to be imprisoned from 1173 until his death in 1189. Eleanor went on to play a role in the governments of both Richard and John, before returning to France and retiring to a nunnery at Fontevraud in Anjou. She died in 1204, in her eighties.

Eleanor lived a dizzying life, revolutionising the way that Europe saw the role of women. Her extraordinary achievements paved the way for centuries of powerful and charismatic women to make their mark on history.

2



1



3



4



THINGS TO SEE

1 Château de Talmont-Saint-Hilaire, Vendée

This fortress near the Atlantic coast was a childhood favourite for Eleanor and her beloved younger sister Aelith, known as Petronilla, who would delight in the freedoms enjoyed away from their father's court in Poitiers. Talmont was, however, tinged with sadness as both Eleanor's mother, Aenor of Châtellerault, and brother William died there in 1130, probably of tuberculosis. Eleanor's son Richard I (the Lionheart) became Prince of Talmont and made the fortress his campaign base in

France. The ruins are now a venue for medieval-themed events and exhibitions.
Tel: (Fr) 2 51 90 27 43
www.chateaudetalmont.com

2 Palais de Justice, Poitiers

Poitiers (*main picture*) was the jewel in Eleanor's crown and every corner of its historic centre has some connection to her remarkable life. Her childhood was spent at her father's court in what is now the Palais de Justice. The Dukes of Aquitaine rebuilt the palace after fire destroyed the 9th-century building, and Eleanor made her own mark by designing the Salle des Pas Perdus (hall of lost footsteps), one of the largest halls in Europe.

3 Cathédrale Saint-Pierre, Poitiers

Poitiers Cathedral was built on the ruins of a Roman basilica where Eleanor and Henry had been married, and the royal couple instigated works in 1162, using a mixture of Romanesque and Gothic styles. The cavernous interior is light and airy, with stained-glass windows surviving from Eleanor's lifetime. The Crucifixion Window is said to have been donated by the royal couple, who are portrayed in the bottom panel. The Église Notre-Dame-La-Grande is another legacy from Eleanor's time in Poitiers - it is where she attended Mass.
Tel: (Fr) 5 49 41 21 24
www.ot-poitiers.fr

4 Fontevraud Abbaye Royale

The monastic city at Fontevraud in the Loire Valley west of Chinon was Eleanor's final refuge and where she oversaw the burial of her son, Richard I, alongside the tomb of his father Henry in the abbey church. Five years before her death, Eleanor pledged £100 a year to the nuns so they would observe in perpetuity the anniversary of her death and those of her husband and the eight children who had died before her. Eleanor is buried next to her husband; her effigy is thought to be the only true likeness in existence.
Tel: (Fr) 2 41 51 73 52
www.fontevraud.fr



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BON APPÉTIT

*The best of French gastronomy
at home and away*



Rise of the croissant

The croissant, that most French of breakfast pastries, is said by some to owe its DNA to the *kifli*, a crescent-shaped sweetmeat from 13th-century Hungary. This bread-like comestible was adopted and renamed *kipferl* – crescent-shaped in German – by the bakers of Vienna to celebrate the end of the 1683 siege of the city by the Ottoman Turks, who had a crescent on their battle flags.

The story goes that a Viennese baker was lighting his ovens in the early hours and heard the Turks tunnelling under the walls. His early warning gave the city's

defenders enough time to muster their troops and defeat the enemy.

In this version, the *kipferl* came to France in 1770, when the 14-year-old Austrian princess Marie-Antoinette arrived to marry the future Louis XVI. She asked for her favourite morning snack and the French bakers turned a plain and simple horseshoe shape of dough into today's light and flaky delight.

A less romantic explanation is that a former Austrian artillery officer called August Zang set up the Boulangerie Viennoise in Paris in 1837, specialising in Austrian delicacies. Inventive rival French

bakers then adapted the recipe to produce copious buttery layers of pastry, and a country's culinary institution was born.

Whichever is the truth, the croissants enjoyed all over the world these days are considered an indisputably French export.

Maison Blanc cafés in London and the south of England are serving new variations on the flavoured croissant. You can indulge in *Le Dunque*; dipping a golden brown pistachio, chocolate or Red Velvet croissant in tea, coffee or hot chocolate, just as they have done in Paris for at least 170 years, and possibly longer. www.maisonblanc.co.uk



The French love to champion their food and cuisine, and no more so than at the *Fête de la Gastronomie* in September. At thousands of events across the country, chefs demonstrate their skills, while farmers and artisan producers showcase regional food and wines. Now in its fifth year, the festival runs from 25-27 September.

www.economie.gouv.fr/fete-gastronomie

Here is a taste of the treats on offer to foodies and *bons vivants*:



Picnics in Burgundy

Celebrations in Burgundy (*pictured above*) focus on more than 30 picnics held in a variety of picturesque locations, from the medieval Abbaye de Cluny and the region's famous

vineyards to the châteaux of Chassagne-Montrachet, Ancy-le-Franc and Sainte-Sabine. The picnics feature regional specialities such as mushrooms and truffles, with dishes prepared by local chefs, but each has its own theme, linked to the location. Expect to find garden parties, treasure hunts, open-air café bars and opportunities to wear fancy dress. Visit www.burgundy-tourism.com and search for 'Fantastic Picnics'.

Limoges roadshow

Festivities in Limoges (*pictured below*) celebrate the Limousin region's beef, pork and lamb, and the town's world-famous porcelain – described as "the container of gastronomy" by Limoges-born chef Jacques Chibois, the event's sponsor. Attractions in and around the main porcelain works include cookery demonstrations from Michelin-starred chefs Jacques Decoret and Michel Portos, and an exhibition by Limoges manufacturers and designers. Visit www.ville-limoges.fr and search for 'Fête de la Gastronomie'.



How to...
POUR THE
PERFECT GLASS
OF CHAMPAGNE
BY EMMANUEL LANDRÉ,
GENERAL MANAGER OF
LE GAVROCHE

Working at one of the best restaurants in the world, I have learnt that a diner's experience comprises many different things. You must have fabulous food, of course, a beautiful setting, wonderful company and perfect service. Here at Le Gavroche, service is of upmost importance and pouring the perfect glass of champagne is imperative!

To begin with, the champagne that you are serving must be one that you enjoy yourself. My personal favourite is Laurent Perrier Grand Siècle.

Make sure the bottle is well chilled and has not been shaken. Then twist the cork, not the bottle, to release the gas slowly to prevent any splashing. Hold the bottle very firmly at the bottom, clasping your fingers around the dent underneath for a strong grip and hold it at a 45° angle. Tilt your champagne glass to a 45° angle towards the bottle and pour slowly to the top, moving the glass upwards as the champagne is poured.

I always prefer to use a white-wine glass, rather than a champagne flute. It makes a real difference to the flavour, as it helps the champagne to breathe.

Et voilà! The perfect glass of champagne!

Emmanuel Landré is general manager of the Michelin-two-star Le Gavroche restaurant, owned by chef-patron Michel Roux Jr, in Upper Brook Street, London. Tel: 0207 408 0881, 0207 499 1826 www.le-gavroche.co.uk



Wine & food matching in... CHAROLLES

The sleepy *commune* of Charolles, in southern Burgundy, is home to France's most famous beef cattle breed. A muscular race with a handsome pale hide, Charolais cattle are now reared as far afield as North America; but in 1993, the farmers of Charolles began to seek *appellation* status for those cattle reared on their home turf. A series of official taste tests confirmed that the beef produced from these animals was indeed more tender and had more complex flavours when reared in the Pays Charolais-Brionnais. So in 2010, Boeuf de Charolles was granted its own *appellation d'origine*.

Whether you are frying a juicy steak or preparing *un bon rosbif*, beef is always improved by a generous glass of red wine. And while Charolais is best, what you should drink with it depends more on how well the meat is cooked than on its provenance. The traditional pairing is with claret, preferably a young wine from the Médoc; although Cahors, Madiran and Bandol work equally well. Their firm tannins and dark fruit flavours match well with rare-cooked meat.

Mais attention! Well-done beef exaggerates the tannins in muscular young wine, so ask for a bottle with a few years' age. Alternatively, try a wine that is higher in acidity with lighter



MAIN PICTURE: The town of Charolles;
INSET: A dish of *carbonnade de boeuf*

tannins, such as a red burgundy from the Côte de Nuits; or something warm and smoky produced in the Rhône Valley, such as syrah from Hermitage, Saint-Joseph or Luberon.

While traditional gravy sauces favour bordeaux matches, try a Côtes du Rhône Villages with *steak au poivre*: its fruity ripeness matches the sauce's richness, and the peppery flavours of both marry well. This would also be my first choice for barbecued beef ribs, although the spicy rosés made in Côtes de Provence and Bandol are refreshing alternatives.

Dominic Rippin

TOP TIP: Now is the time to plan a winter trip to hunt for truffles, also known as 'black gold'. Among the best places to visit is the Lot where Lalbenque opens its exciting truffle market each Tuesday between early December and mid-March.

WINES OF THE MONTH BY SALLY EASTON, MASTER OF WINE

Famille Chabbert, Mas du Colombel 2013, Faugères

This is a full-bodied, uncomplicated red from the Languedoc. Faugères is known for its rocky schist soils, which reflect warmth and are said to impart a certain stoniness to the wine. This is no exception, with a salty note to the mid-palate. The blend of grenache, syrah, mourvèdre and carignan gives flavours of plums and iodine; tannins are sweet and smooth, and the finish is spicy.

Drink with: Barbecued steak and sausages.

Majestic, £11.99 (£8.99 if you buy two)
Tel: 0345 605 6767
www.majestic.co.uk



Château La Fleur Morange, Mathilde 2007, Saint-Émilion

The all-merlot Mathilde is the second wine of Château La Fleur Morange, a Saint-Émilion *Grand Cru classé*. A sweet fruitcake note emerges on the nose amid brambles and redcurrants. Earth and aromatic tar are the first flavours, giving way to liquorice root, forest berries and sweet blackberries. The supple tannins add a flavoursome balance to a wine that could happily keep for a couple more years.

Drink with: Roast pork, lamb or beef.

Bordeaux Undiscovered, £19.50
Tel: 0800 876 6958
www.bordeaux-undiscovered.co.uk



Domaines Schlumberger, Riesling Grand Cru Saering 2010, Alsace

Saering, which was first documented in 1250, is one of four *Grands Crus* in the village of Guebwiller, and the south-east and east-facing slopes get plenty of sunshine. Riesling does well on the mix of marl, limestone and sandstone. This example is racy and dry, with some bodily heft befitting its top *appellation*. Flavours are bold, with citrus lines to the acidity, juicy ripe peachiness and honeyed tones, even though it's dry. A steely, firestone savouriness adds complexity and appeal.

Drink with: Seared shellfish, paella.
Roberson, £23.95
Tel: 0207 381 7870
www.robersonwine.com





Make the perfect... Pumpkin soup

As the days grow shorter **Rosa Jackson** finds comfort in preparing a dish full of earthy autumn flavours

I always have trouble accepting the end of summer. I would like the tomato plants to keep producing sweet, vine-ripened fruits all year, and my supply of fragrant Cavaillon melons from Provence never to dry up. Much as I love crisp apples and silky pears, they cannot compare to the frank sensuality of a peach at its peak.

Fortunately, a few things make the transition to cooler nights easier to bear: bunches of deep purple muscat grapes, earthy cep mushrooms from the mountains behind Nice and the first bowl of pumpkin soup, as comforting as a cardigan when the breeze picks up.

The most common French variety – called *musqué de Provence* – has muted orange-grey skin and thick, deep orange flesh. Because it's so large, this ribbed pumpkin is usually sold in wedges.

Other varieties have been popping up at market stalls in recent years, one of the most popular being the *potimarron*, which loosely translates as chestnut squash. Known as kabocha squash in English, this Asian variety has a dense, slightly dry flesh reminiscent of chestnut, and a sweet but not sugary taste. I particularly love it for soup as it doesn't need to be peeled, and pairs equally well with French and Asian flavours. Usually an orange colour with a pointy tip, it can also have dark green skin.

In Nice I also see a squash (technically a vegetable marrow) called *trompette de Nice*, which starts the season as a pale green, striped courgette with a slightly bulbous end before turning dark green and finally orange, at which point it can weigh several kilograms. The darker the flesh the sweeter it will be, though this squash has a subtler taste than the *musqué de Provence* or *potimarron*.



Food critic and cookbook author Rosa Jackson lives in Nice, where she runs the cookery school Les Petits Farcis and writes about food for publications worldwide.

When it comes to soup, nothing beats roasting to deepen the character of the squash and add a caramelised dimension. Once the squash and onions are soft and browned they need only to be blended with stock and your chosen flavourings.

Because of its smooth sweetness, pumpkin soup needs a little imagination to take it from good to great. Earthy garnishes such as wild mushrooms and fried slices of black pudding work well, as do zingy elements such as fresh ginger or orange zest and juice. Croutons or roasted pumpkin seeds are a good idea, as are sliced chives. Although a spoonful of double cream or crème fraîche is arguably essential, too much dairy can overwhelm the flavour of the pumpkin.

When I'm using Asian spices such as Thai red curry paste, I add a little coconut milk. There is nothing better than this spiced-up soup to make me forget that the days are getting shorter. ☺

ROASTED PUMPKIN SOUP

Potimarron (kabocha squash) or *musqué de Provence* would be my top choices for soup; butternut is a little too sweet for me, though it's possible to counteract that with spices.

- 800g/1lb 13oz squash (pumpkin or another variety)
- 1 red onion
- 2tbsp olive oil
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 sprig rosemary
- 375-500ml/1½-2 cups vegetable or chicken stock (I like the Kall® organic onion soup stock cubes)
- 1tbsp crème fraîche
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

SERVES
4

1. Preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6. Peel the squash if necessary (depending on the variety) and cut it into 2.5cm/1in chunks. Cut the red onion into six or eight wedges depending on the size.

2. Place the squash and onion in a large roasting tin and toss with the oil, herbs and a sprinkling of sea salt, keeping the pumpkin on one side and the onion on the other. Roast for 25-30 minutes, until soft and browned, but not burnt. Remove the red onions a little earlier if necessary.

3. Place the squash and onions in a saucepan with 375ml of stock. Heat until almost boiling, then liquidise with a stick blender (or transfer to a blender). Thin with a little more stock if necessary. Stir in the crème fraîche and adjust the seasonings.

4. Serve with garnishes such as croutons, chopped chives, another spoonful of crème fraîche, sautéed mushrooms, chestnuts, crisp pancetta or browned slices of black pudding.

1 Le Chapon Fin

Le Chapon Fin has been at the heart of the Bordeaux cuisine landscape for nearly 200 years, but I found it was easy to miss in the elegant Quartier des Grands Hommes. The doorway was anonymous and the entrance hall narrow, but continuing into the restaurant beyond was akin to going through the back of the wardrobe and into C. S. Lewis's fantasy world of Narnia.

The interior comprises a brightly lit art-nouveau garden and fantasy cave of rough stone, with candlelit niches for romantic dining – all carrying the promise of a primeval frisson. Despite the back-to-nature allusions, this is a hallowed hall and plaques commemorate bygone regulars: actress Sarah Bernhardt came to dine on the ortolan bird (a now-forbidden delicacy) and artist Toulouse-Lautrec met his friends. Such was its reputation that Michelin included it in the first group of 33 three-starred restaurants in 1933.

The maître d', who showed me to my corner table, seemed a little disappointed at my lack of lustre, but I took her superior tone as a sign that this was still a centre of upper-class dining.

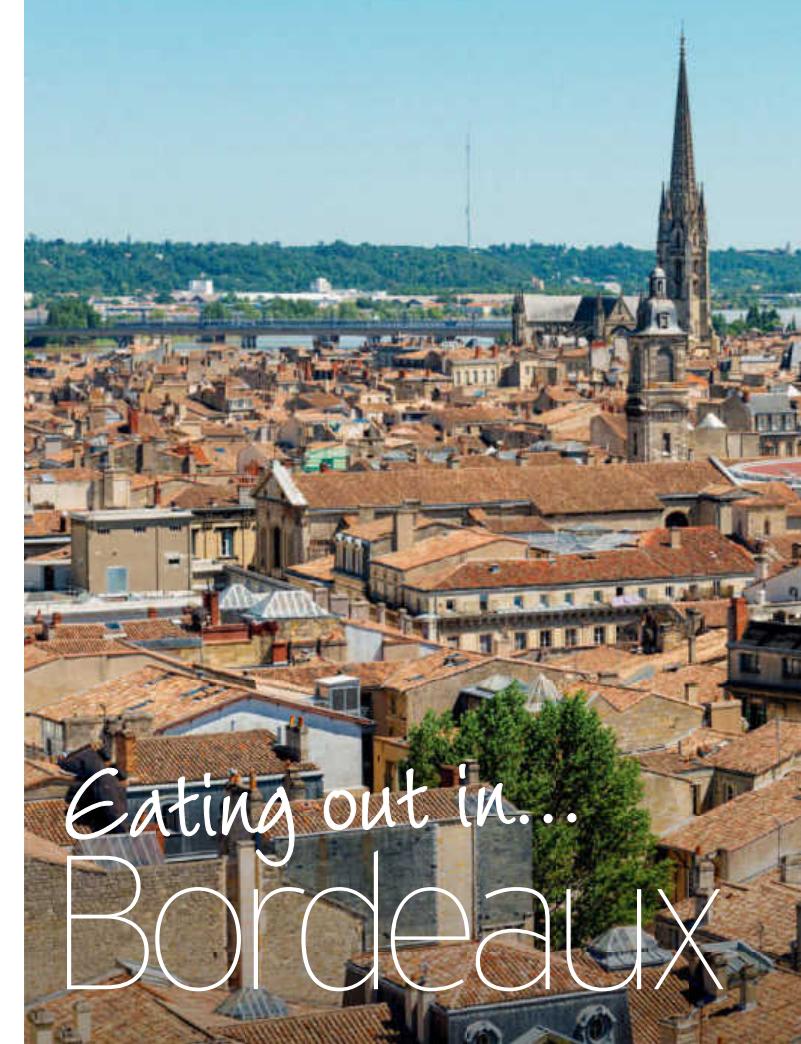
Le Chapon Fin lost its remaining Michelin star this year but it is a restaurant in transition and new chef Nicholas Nyguen (*pictured below*) is putting his stamp on the cuisine with reinventions of fin-de-siècle classics such as jugged hare and eggs Florentine.

I opted for the €28 lunchtime menu and was treated to an unusual array of dishes that suggested the star would be reinstated. Portions were tiny but the robust flavours filled the mouth. Iberico ham was served alongside black radish and a perfect cube of butternut jelly. The main was cod accompanied by potato mousse, pineapple and orange. Nyguen is particularly fond of cooking with orange. For the *café gourmand* dessert, citrusy cubes of jelly cut through the sweetness of the white chocolate and caramel.

Le Chapon Fin was among the first to marry fine Bordeaux wines with great food and another innovation is to dine in the cellar and be guided through its prestigious wines by sommelier Alexandre Morin.

Le 28 and *Le 39* menus (lunch only) €28 and €39, *Dégustation* (lunch and evening) €98, *Découvertes* and *Menu Confiance* (evening only) €68 and €85.

Le Chapon Fin, 5 Rue Montesquieu, 33000 Bordeaux, tel: (Fr) 5 56 79 10 10, www.chapon-fin.fr



Eating out in... Bordeaux

The city that is a byword for wine is also a great place for dining, with restaurants to suit all tastes and budgets, says **Paul Lamarra**

2 Brasserie l'Orléans

It was a wet January night when I visited the Brasserie l'Orléans. On my approach, the door swung open and the smiling waiter, waving to the almost empty restaurant, said: “*On est complet.*” The joke was followed by a warm welcome from the barman.

Established in 1942 during the dark days of the war as Chez Andrée, Brasserie l'Orléans exudes a cheerful charm and a dash of Hollywood glamour, as it takes its inspiration from an American diner. I took my seat at one end of the long red leather banquette with my back to the equally long mirror. From here I took in the retro advertising for Roederer Champagne and Lillet, the local wine-based aperitif, the clean curves of the zinc-topped bar, red neon signs, black and white prints of famous diners and a collection of chrome coffee machines.

The brasserie has been sustained by generations of *Bordelais* and it soon filled up with regulars, who were greeted by name and kisses. Nostalgia is the byword here, so the menu takes few risks and sticks with comforting favourites. In the tradition of a grand city bistro, this is the place to come for a plateau of oysters, eggs and mayonnaise, *tête de veau* and onion soup.

For a starter, I almost went for the salmon tartare but in the end opted for a dozen baked snails. My main was a generous



bowl of spaghetti with squid, cuttlefish and chorizo, and the dessert a selection of classic *petits desserts* that included crème brûlée, chocolate mousse and an almondly *madeleine*.

A dozen oysters cost €25, onion soup €8, *entrecôte bordelaise* €25.50, crème brûlée €7.50. Open all week.

Brasserie l'Orléans, 3 Allées d'Orléans, 33000 Bordeaux, tel: (Fr) 5 56 00 50 06, www.brasserie-lorleans.fr

MUST TRY
A coffee in Bordeaux is sure to come with a *canelé* pastry. A custard batter flavoured with rum, almond or vanilla is cooked in a cylindrical mould to produce these little ribbed sponges. *Canelés Baillardran* are considered the best.

3 Belle Campagne

Bordeaux's student district is centred on Place de la Victoire in the Quartier Saint-Michel, a now-pedestrianised area of medieval streets that has shaken off a somewhat shady past. It is now crowded with lively eateries selling the student staples of pizza, noodles and burgers.

On the edge of this district, just inside the Quartier Saint-Pierre, Belle Campagne is trying to appeal to the more discerning hipster with food that has been scrupulously selected according to earnest locavore principles. A locavore is someone who eats only locally produced food, which in Belle Campagne's case means within a 250-kilometre radius. More than 70 named producers within Bordeaux itself, Aquitaine, Cognac and the Pyrénées supply the finest seasonal produce that has been reared in a way that maintains the natural diversity of the environment. For instance, Jean-Christophe Duleau from Brannens in the Gironde raises pigeons while Louis Ospital, based in the Pyrénées, supplies Basque *saucisson* and cured hams.

Belle Campagne, run by chef-owners Adrian Bacquet and Manuel Dagens (*pictured below*), is certainly different. After being shown to my table in an upstairs room that resembled a student flat, I was told by the casually dressed waiter that there were no rules: I didn't have to order a starter followed by a main, and there were no individual orders. I didn't even need to use the cutlery; this was food for sharing and for fingers, and it did not always appear on a plate either.

Once I had ordered a selection of 'tapas' from the clipboard menu that also explained the restaurant's ethos, my small table was inundated with boards and dishes of creamed haricot beans, black radish, oysters, smoked beef, hot brioche and veal stock, smoked mackerel, melted Rocamadour cheese and chips with garlic mayo. Basically what you see is what you get and there is no attempt to enhance or disguise flavours.



Having over-ordered on the savouries, I could not possibly contemplate dessert.

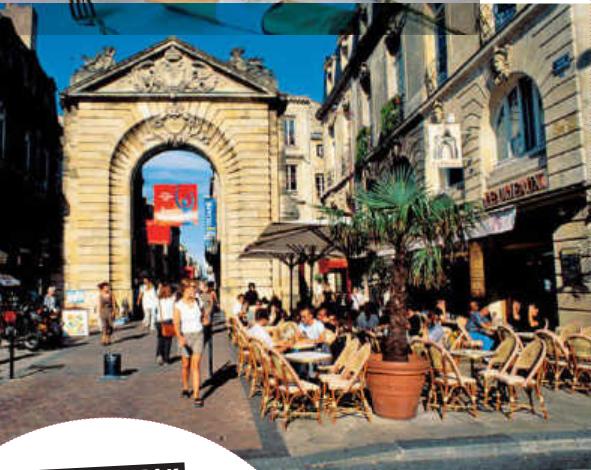
Frites €3.50 (ketchup €1), marinated beef €7; pigeon €22; cheese €7. Closed Mondays.
La Belle Campagne, 15 Rue des Bahutiers, 33000 Bordeaux, tel: (Fr) 5 56 81 16 51, www.belle-campagne.fr ➤



APÉRO

Grand Hôtel de Bordeaux & Spa
2-5 Place de la Comédie
33000 Bordeaux
Tel: (Fr) 5 57 30 44 44
www.ghbordeaux.com

This hotel is the place to be seen, either in the classy interior Orangerie or on the terrace overlooking the grand Place de la Comédie. Cocktails cost from €17.

**COFFEE BREAK**

Café Dijeaux
14 Place Gambetta
33000 Bordeaux
Tel: (Fr) 5 56 81 90 65

Watch the world go by at a table on the edge of one of the city's main squares, where every coffee is served with a *canelé*. The spot is favoured by French celebrities, and in the summer catches a welcome cool breeze.

FROM TOP: Succulent hams line a stall at the Marché des Capucins; A picturesque corner in the Grand Hôtel de Bordeaux & Spa; The terrace of Café Dijeaux just off Place Gambetta

Eating in

Explore the markets and shops of Bordeaux and make a meal out of the finest local produce that the Aquitaine region can offer

**MARKETS****Marché des Capucins**

Place des Capucins
33000 Bordeaux
www.marchedescapucins.com

Bordeaux's biggest and most important market was first held in this square in 1749 and from the 19th century was considered the 'belly of the city'. Around 80 stallholders set up inside the covered area, which is open six days a week: Tuesday to Friday from 6am-1pm and weekends from 5.30am-2.30pm.

For a more refined experience seek out the market in the basement of Place des Grands Hommes in the upmarket 'golden triangle' in the heart of the city. Open from 7am-7pm (not Sunday).

BREAD AND PASTRIES**Boulangerie Saint-Michel**

49-51 Rue des Fauves
33000 Bordeaux
Tel: (Fr) 6 99 41 00 44

www.laboulangeriesaintmichel.fr

The young team at this *boulangerie* produce traditional and speciality breads in an informal environment with much of the process on show. The must-buy is the *tarte aux framboises* (€2). Closed Sundays and lunchtimes from 1.30pm-4.30pm.

DELICATESSEN
Boutique Dubernet

9 Rue Michel Montaigne
33000 Bordeaux

Tel: (Fr) 5 56 48 06 05
www.maison-dubernet.com

Since 1864 Maison Dubernet has been the place to shop for Bordeaux and other south-west France specialities. The shop stocks the finest foie gras, *confits de canard* and *cassoulet*.

CHEESE**Jean d'Alos**

4 Rue Montesquieu
33000 Bordeaux
Tel: (Fr) 5 56 44 29 66
www.jean-dalos.com

Jean d'Alos, a cheesemonger in the city since 1983, matures up to 150 varieties in the cellar under his shop. As well as stocking cheese from all over France and the rest of Europe, he has created two cheeses of his own. Tome de Bordeaux is a goat's cheese covered with herbs, and Tome d'Aquitaine a cow's milk cheese with a crust washed in Sauternes. To know more about maturing cheese, join a cellar tasting (€12).

WINE
Max Bordeaux

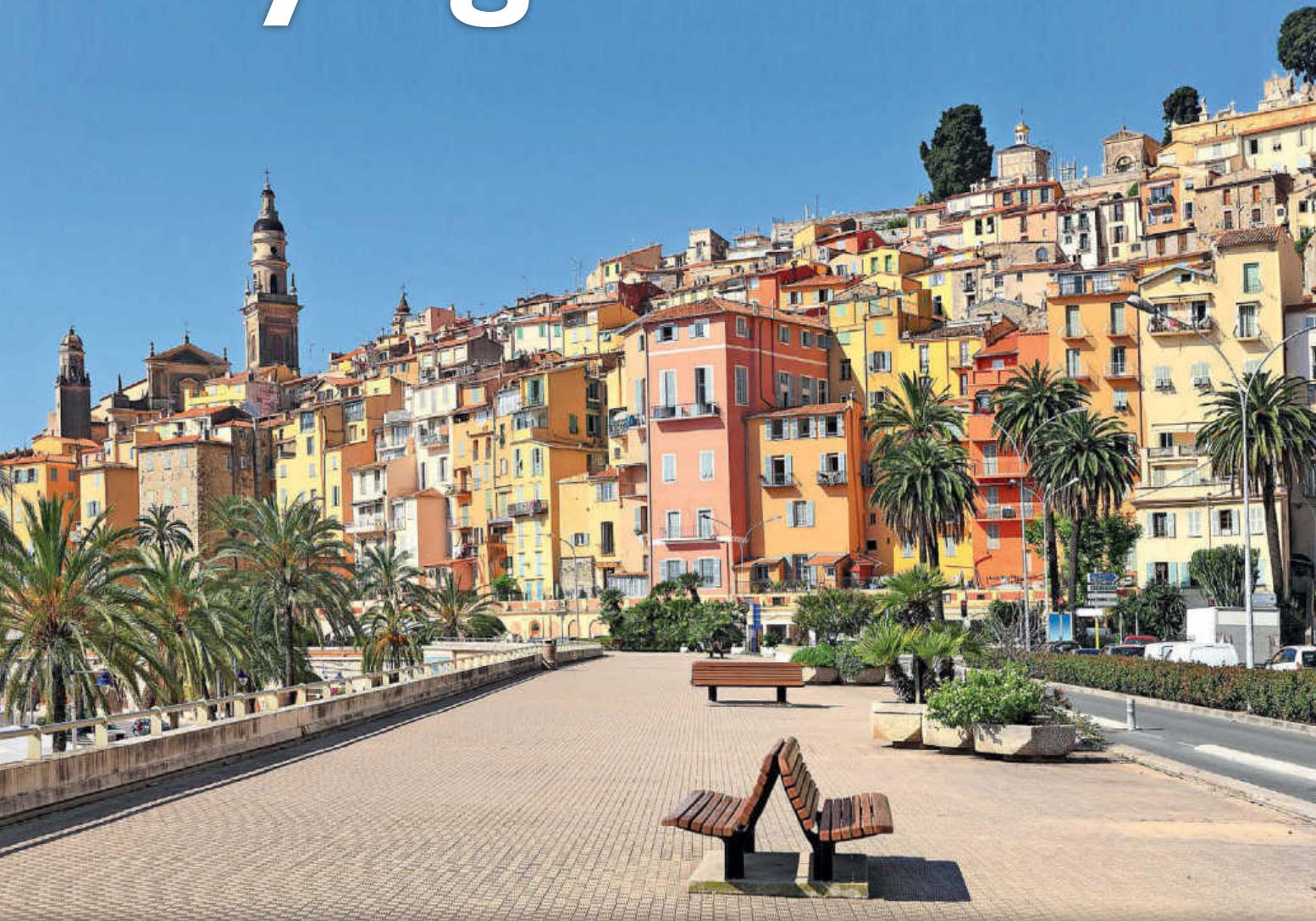
14 Cours de l'Intendance
33000 Bordeaux
Tel: (Fr) 5 57 29 23 81
www.maxbordeaux.com

The crisp black and white decor means that nothing distracts you from the thousands of bottles of wine stacked in military order. The shop's *Grand Cru* range starts from under €35 and you can also taste thimblefuls of the best bordeaux wines. A 25ml (1.5tbsp) sample of a Château Latour 1994 will set you back €35.

PHOTOGRAPHS: LUDOVIC MAISANT/HMIS/FR, MAURIZIO BORGESI/HEMIS.FR

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Take home... Canned sardines

In her regular column, **Clotilde Dusoulier** shows how to cook with the produce we buy in France

The French have a knack for elevating the simplest foods to cult status, and nowhere is it more apparent than with canned sardines: what others might consider a last-resort larder standby is seen instead as a delectable treat that won't break the bank.

Most French canned sardines are fished in the Atlantic and processed in one of the many coastal canneries, the best of which have kept the artisanal methods alive. These companies handle fresh fish only during the fishing season, from May to November, and a large part of the process is done by hand. After the heads are removed, the sardines are fried in oil, drained and lovingly tucked to bed, top to tail, in their tins. The care is evident when you open such a can: the sardines are nearly aligned and intact, their skin perfectly smooth, shiny with the high-quality oil they are swimming in.

While most canneries offer an array of recipes (sardines in tomato sauce, with lemon, chillies, garlic, olives etc.) I opt for the simplest ones, preserved in olive oil, and wouldn't dream of choosing the ones that have been deboned (*sans arêtes*): the bones don't bother me one bit – in fact, I love the crunchy spine – and they are a good source of calcium.

Canned sardines are wonderful to keep on hand for a quick and enjoyable lunch: plop them on a slice of good bread spread with salted butter, add a green salad, and you're in business. You can also slip finely sliced garlic and slim wedges of



Clotilde Dusoulier
lives in Paris and
writes a popular
food blog,
*Chocolate &
Zucchini*. She
has published
cookbooks and
a guide to Paris
restaurants and
food shops.

lemon in between the fillets, and place the open tin under the grill until hot and fragrant. Every French cook has their own recipe for sardine rillettes, a flavoursome spread to dollop on to thin slices of baguette or crackers for an emergency aperitif nibble. Needless to say, the oil shouldn't be thrown out; save it for a vinaigrette, or to finish a stir-fry or a dish of pasta.

Artisanal canned sardines are an affordable delicacy, going for €3-4 per 120g tin, and there is a rich tradition of decorative or commemorative cans that make them lovely edible gifts.

If you want to graduate to true connoisseurship, seek out cans of *sardines millésimées*; these small sardines have been fished at the height of the season in late summer, and the vintage year is displayed on the can. These top-of-the-crop sardines improve over time and collectors allow them to age for years, flipping the cans every six months until they have reached their full flavour potential after six to 12 years. ☺

SARDINE RILLETTES WITH CUMIN AND DATES

- 2 120g cans high-quality sardines packed in olive oil
- 60ml plain yogurt
- 1 small bunch fresh chives
- 2 Medjool dates

- 1tbsp lemon juice
- 1tsp ground cumin
- ¼tsp fine sea salt
- 1. Drain the sardines from the cans, reserving the olive oil.

- 2. Place in the bowl of a food processor with the yogurt, chives, dates, lemon juice, cumin and salt.
- 3. Process until combined, but

not too smooth. Taste and adjust seasoning.
4. Use as a sandwich spread, spoon on to crackers, or eat with vegetable sticks.

SERVES
6

What's in a label?

Descriptions on French wine bottles can be a challenge to decipher. Dominic Rippon offers advice on how to read between the lines

From the bistros of Bordeaux to the shelves of your supermarket, a wine bottle's label is its first – and possibly only – opportunity to say 'drink me'. But French labels are some of the world's most complicated and tightly regulated. Rules specify everything from the vine yields permitted for a wine to qualify for its *appellation d'origine*, to the minimum size of the print for the alcohol percentage on the label. Good branding is essential to a wine's success, but a closer inspection of its label can be more revealing.

Appellation

The words *appellation d'origine protégée* (AOP) are intended to distinguish a wine at the top of the French quality hierarchy. Rules govern the percentages of permitted grape varieties in blends, vine yields, ageing requirements and, most importantly, where the grapes are grown. An *appellation* can be for an entire region, a smaller sub-zone or a single village; for example, Bordeaux, Haut-Médoc



Dominic Rippon has many years' experience in the wine trade, both in the UK and France, and now runs the wine merchant business Strictly Wine.



and Pauillac; as a rule, the smaller the *appellation* area, the stricter the rules. In Burgundy, *Grand Cru* wines come from single vineyards, each of which has its own *appellation*.

However, just as *appellation* status does not guarantee vinous excellence, a wine labelled *indication géographique protégée* (IGP) may well be outstanding, even though its grapes can come from a larger geographic area. The rules governing the production of IGP wines are also more relaxed than for AOPs, but this in turn allows more scope for invention. A winemaker in the Limoux area of Languedoc, for example, might decide that his *terroir* is better suited to pinot noir for his reds than it is to the grape varieties permitted by *appellation* regulations (merlot, cabernet, grenache, syrah, malbec and carignan), and therefore produce his wine as IGP Pays d'Oc instead of AOP Limoux.

Vin de France replaced what was called *vin de table* before 2010: a simple designation for wines sourced from anywhere in France. It tends to be reserved for large-volume, pan-French blends, but is also used by firebrand growers, such as Jean-Paul Luc at the Villa Minna vineyard in Provence, who prefer to be free from bureaucratic constraints and received wisdom.

Grape variety

The idea that grape variety is subordinate to *terroir* is deeply engrained in French wine culture, so grape names are rarely allowed on

the front labels of *appellation* wines. The exception is Alsace, where wine lists are packed with AOP rieslings, gewürztraminers and pinot blancs; but even here most winemakers distinguish between their *vins de cépage*, in which the accent is on the grape's character, and their more complex *vins de terroir*, where the soil's influence is paramount. IGP wines, by contrast, frequently advertise grape varieties on their labels, which helps them to reach international markets. If in doubt, I usually pick a wine made from a local grape: although sauvignon blanc can make refreshing wines in the Pays d'Oc, I would almost always rather drink a Mediterranean variety such as viognier or marsanne.

The producer

Independent wine estates, known as *propriétaires-récoltants* or *viticulteurs*, make wine from their own grapes. They're usually proud to display their *domaine* or château name in prominent letters on their front labels. But wines made by *négociants* can be harder to identify. A *négociant* is a merchant house that buys grapes, juice or even finished wine, which it bottles and sells under its own brand. A famous example is Mouton Cadet, a brand owned by the Rothschild family of Château Mouton Rothschild, made with grapes bought from other Bordeaux growers. This is also how many supermarkets buy their own-label wines, so look for the word *négociant* on the back label to identify the merchant bottler.

Another source of own-label wine is the cooperative wine cellar, which usually appears on wine labels as *La Cave de...* or *Les Vignerons de...* To confuse things further, *négociants* and *caves coopératives* can use estate names, but only if all the grapes in the wine come from a single winery. The words *mis en bouteille à la propriété/au domaine/au château* mean the wine was bottled at the estate where its grapes were grown.

Although the wines from small estates benefit from the winemaker's personal craft, the economies of scale at a *cave coopérative* or a *négociant* house mean that their wines are often sold at more competitive prices.



Alcohol level

The percentage of alcohol by volume (abv) in wine is a hot topic, with low-alcohol wines in high demand. As the planet has warmed, alcohol levels have risen, so wines of more than 13 per cent are now commonplace, even in traditionally cool regions such as Burgundy and the Loire Valley. *Appellation* rules include permitted alcohol levels, so in an unusually warm year, a producer might be forced to 'declassify' his wine to *vin de France* if it becomes too heady. There is an official tolerance of 0.5 per cent, so if you see 15 per cent on a wine label, the chances are that it's closer to 15.5 per cent.

Vintage

Vintages are important markers of a wine's style, staying power and freshness. At the top end of the claret market, bottles can vary by hundreds of pounds between vintages; while if you're buying to glug, you should insist on drinking the most recent harvest. Up to 15 per cent of the wine can come from a vintage other than that stated on the label, so winemakers often 'freshen' what's left of their previous harvest with a little of the new vintage to prolong its life. The same tolerance also applies to the grape varieties used, so you might well be drinking up to 15 per cent of a cheaper variety, such as grenache blanc, or an aroma-boosting dash of muscat, in your bottle labelled chardonnay. ☺

CLOCKWISE, FROM FACING PAGE:
Vineyards in the Saint-Émilion *appellation* of Bordeaux; An Alsace *appellation* wine with the grape variety printed – a rarity in the rest of France; The brand name gets top billing in this Bordeaux wine; Vineyards around the village of Riquewihr in Haut-Rhin

OTHER WINE LABEL TERMS

Vieilles vignes:

Literally 'old vines', the term has no legal definition, but is based on the belief that older plants produce smaller quantities of more concentrated fruit. Vines can live for more than 100 years, but are

generally considered

'old' after about 30 vintages.

Clos: A single, traditionally walled plot of vines.

Cru: Literally means 'growth'; a single vineyard or distinct group of superior vineyards.

Réserve:

Usually refers to an estate's higher-quality blend (distinguished from the more humble 'Tradition'), but has no legal significance.

Sec: Dry.

Demi-sec: Medium-dry.

Moelleux/doux: Sweet.

Biologique: Organic.



DVD RELEASE

A Little Chaos

Starring: Kate Winslet,
Matthias Schoenaerts

Director: Alan Rickman

Running time: 117 minutes

Certificate: 12

Release date: 24 August



Watching actor-turned-director Alan Rickman's period drama is more than a little frustrating. With a cast that includes Kate Winslet, Matthias Schoenaerts and Stanley Tucci, and with the magnificent Palais de Versailles as a backdrop, *A Little Chaos* has a lot going for it, but never quite reaches its full potential.

Schoenaerts stars as a younger, more handsome version of the real-life André le Nôtre who, in the 17th century, was considered the greatest landscape architect in France, designing gardens at Vaux-le-Vicomte, Fontainebleau and the Tuilleries in Paris. When Louis XIV (Rickman) tells him to beautify the grounds at Versailles he starts interviewing potential assistants. The job eventually goes to Sabine de Barra (Winslet), a woman with a troubled past who has a more open-minded, free-flowing approach to landscaping. As De Barra (a fictional character) goes about designing an elaborate water feature she grows ever closer to le Nôtre, something that doesn't go unnoticed by his vengeful wife (Helen McCrory).

The cast put in wholehearted performances with the likes of Jennifer Ehle (as a mistress of the king) and Tucci (as a court dandy) popping up in eye-catching roles. Winslet is impressive as ever (a scene where she spends an afternoon talking to the king after mistaking him for a fellow horticulturalist is a highlight) and she has great chemistry with Schoenaerts. The Oscar-winner's efforts go some way to glossing over weaknesses in the script, which is full of heavy-handed metaphors. In the end, *A Little Chaos* is a watchable, if underwhelming, tale of romance among the roses.

Pierre de Villiers

PHOTOGRAPHS: EVA/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; NEIL COOPER

OTHER CINEMA AND DVD RELEASES

CINEMA

La Famille Bélier (from 11 September) - A teenager (Louane Emera) who acts as interpreter for her deaf family has some tough choices to make when a teacher encourages her to go

to Paris for a singing competition. This comedy earned Emera a César for most promising actress at this year's awards.

45 Years (from 28 August) - British/French actress Charlotte Rampling gives a brilliant performance along with Tom Courtenay in this drama about a couple whose long marriage is thrown into turmoil after the discovery of a body in the Alps.

Five minutes with... CATHERINE ALLIOTT

The best-selling British author talks about the story behind her new book *Wish You Were Here* (see review, right centre) and the irresistible lure of France

Our family goes to France quite a lot and particularly loves visiting Seillans, a hilltop village an hour from the beaches of the Côte d'Azur. The château that is featured in my book is actually in the Dordogne; it's such a beautiful place that I felt compelled to include it in the story and simply moved its location to the village that we cherish so much.

The idea in my book of a whole family piling into a French château for a week is something with which I am very familiar. Every other year my father-in-law takes us all to France, where we rent a château, and there can be as many as 22 of us together. It's a big crowd but we all have fun and I thought it would be an interesting experience to write about. I made sure that I enjoyed my French holiday, so I didn't write the book while I was in France. Instead, I absorbed my different experiences and put them together at home in the English countryside.

I've been going to France for a long time. I've always been bowled over by the food, the landscape and, particularly in



the south of the country, all the different colours. Although we have so far resisted buying a house there, the south of France is so wonderfully relaxed and full of special towns and villages. Another favourite area is the Loire Valley – its many châteaux are simply gorgeous.

Most of my novels have been set in the English countryside and I think my next one will be, too. I'm trying to resist writing about France for a while – because it's so beautiful! – but that may ultimately prove too difficult.

Catherine Alliott was talking to Peter Stewart



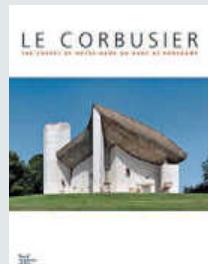
DVD

P'tit Quinquin (from 28 September) - Bruno Dumont, director of hard-hitting social dramas for the big screen, tries his hand at TV with this offbeat murder mystery series. It is set in a village near Boulogne where a pair of incompetent detectives are trying to catch a serial killer.

BOOKS

LE CORBUSIER: THE CHAPEL OF NOTRE-DAME DU HAUT AT RONCHAMP

Maria Antonietta Crippa and Françoise Caussé, Royal Academy Publications, distributed by Thames & Hudson, £48

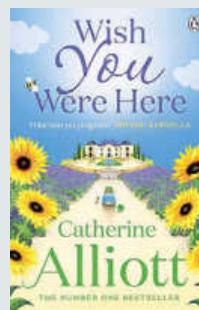


Considered one of the French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier's most dramatic works, the Chapel of Notre-Dame du Haut is vividly brought to life in this large-format book, the first comprehensive illustrated study of the building. The authors unearth the reasons why Le Corbusier built such an ethereal place of worship in the Franche-Comté countryside, and also explore the controversies surrounding it. They consider his skills as an artist and sculptor, and chart the deliberations of the commissioning body, using testimony from those present in 1950. Featuring a wealth of stunning, detailed photographs and plans, this is a fitting tribute to the architect on the 50th anniversary of his death. ★★★★

WISH YOU WERE HERE

Catherine Alliott, Penguin, £7.99

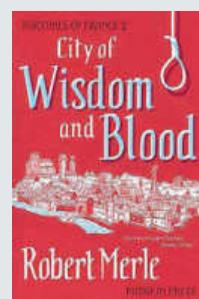
Flora Murray-Brown has been looking forward to getting away from the pressures of daily life in London and spending a holiday with her husband and two daughters in a château up in the mountains behind the Côte d'Azur. But any dreams of a relaxing break are shattered as her extended family descends; she is overrun by her daughters' boyfriends, not to mention her domineering best friend and forgetful mother. Tempers soon fray and family secrets are laid bare as the stay takes unexpected twists and turns. This entertaining and light-hearted story makes ideal holiday reading. ★★★★



CITY OF WISDOM AND BLOOD

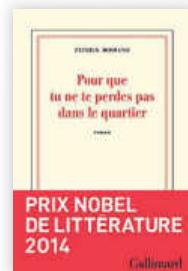
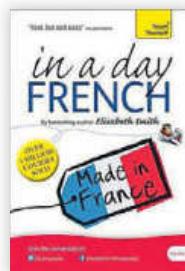
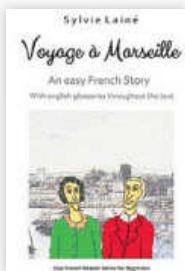
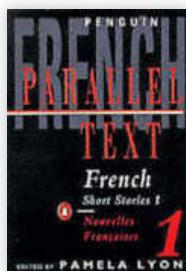
Robert Merle, Pushkin Press, £8.99

From the author of *The Brethren* comes the second instalment of his 13-part historical saga *Fortunes of France*, which is finally being translated into English nearly 40 years after its first publication. This swashbuckling sequel is set in the 1560s and the title refers to the French city of Montpellier, which at the time was known both for its university and its lawlessness. The story follows young Pierre de Siorac and his two companions as they begin life away from their Périgord home, armed and ready to take on the local bandits. ★★★



LEARNING IN PARALLEL

Bilingual texts lead the way in Peter Stewart's round-up of accessible language resources



I enjoy coming across books of stories with **parallel texts** in English and French. They are growing in popularity and are no longer exclusively for advanced learners. The books are usually concise and point out both the similarities and differences between the two languages.

An excellent example is *Penguin Parallel Text: French Short Stories Volume 1* (Penguin, £9.99), which contains eight contrasting tales from 20th-century authors including Raymond Queneau and Pierre Gascar. The stories are arranged in order of difficulty and have what the publishers describe as a literal rather than a literary English translation, with notes on the text.

A slightly simpler yet equally enjoyable read is *Voyage à Marseille* (Sylvie Lainé, £5.90), which is written in an everyday style, with key words listed both at the end of each paragraph and at the back in a comprehensive vocabulary section.

Those who prefer to listen and learn will find plenty of help in Elisabeth Smith's

Beginner's French in a Day: Teach Yourself (Hodder Education, £5.99). The CD **audio course** covers essential topics for a holiday or business trip, such as how to order meals and ask for directions. Learners can also download a holiday phrasebook to take with them to France.

I highly recommend **language courses** for developing your awareness of French. The Institut Linguistique Adenet (www.ila-france.com), housed in a beautiful *hôtel particulier* in sunny Montpellier, runs tailor-made courses from €220. Classes are complemented by a variety of trips to other towns in the south of France.

Experienced francophiles interested in contemporary French **literature** can try the novel *Pour que tu ne te perdes pas dans le quartier* (Gallimard, £14.95) by the 2014 Nobel Literature Prize winner Patrick Modiano. Focusing on the contents of a writer's lost notebook, the story seems simple, but it leads readers through a maze of complex ideas to its intriguing conclusion.

Do say, DON'T SAY:

If you cannot find a plug socket in your hotel room to charge a phone, be sure to use the word '*douille*' and say '*Y-a-t-il une douille dans la chambre?*' If you choose the near-homophone '*socquette*' you'll be asking for an ankle sock.

GRAMMAR CORNER

ACUTE AND GRAVE ACCENTS

In French, the acute accent, or *l'accent aigu*, appears only on top of the letter 'e' ('é'). Without the accent the letter is usually pronounced 'uh'. With the accent the pronunciation becomes 'eh'. An example is *élégant*, which means smart, and is pronounced 'ehl-eh-gon'. The lack of an acute accent in *semaine* (week) means that 'se' is pronounced 'suh'.

By contrast, the grave accent, *l'accent grave*, does not affect the pronunciation of a vowel. It appears over the letter 'e' when the following syllable is mute. Examples are *mère* for mother, and *très*, (very), pronounced 'tray'.

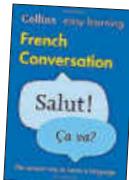
The accent is also placed over 'a' and 'u' on a number of words. Examples are: *à*, which means 'to' and is pronounced 'ah', and *au-delà*, which can mean beyond and is pronounced 'oh-duh-lah'.

THIS MONTH'S BEST PICKS

BEGINNERS

Easy Learning French Conversation, Collins, £7.99

This easy-to-use guide is perfect for beginners wanting to communicate in French and learn about the country's culture. The book is divided into 12 units, each with everyday words and structures for a particular situation, and comes with a downloadable audio file for use while you're on the go.



INTERMEDIATE

501 French Verbs, Barron's Educational Series, £11.99

The seventh edition of this best-selling series, which is due out in September, lists the major French verbs fully conjugated and in alphabetical order. The easy-reference guide comes with a free CD-ROM which contains crossword puzzles and games to help you practise your verbs.



ADVANCED

Germinal, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, £16.61

This bilingual edition of Émile Zola's classic 1885 novel is definitely one for experienced students of French. The story, set in an impoverished and exploited mining community in northern France, will test readers with its powerful narrative and mix of dialects.



CELEBRATING THE VINE

A fraternity created nine centuries ago adds a splash of colour to the wine-gathering festivities in Saint-Émilion, says **Peter Stewart**

Le mois de septembre en France est synonyme de vendanges, une période où le travail acharné de tous les vignerons est récompensé par une récolte exceptionnelle. Alors que de nombreuses villes et villages à travers l'Hexagone organisent des cérémonies pour marquer la récolte, c'est la ville médiévale de Saint-Émilion, près de Bordeaux, qui, grâce à son Jurade, organise l'une des meilleures et des plus historiques célébrations du pays.

Cette fraternité de vin est composée d'environ 100 jurats qui annoncent la récolte chaque année durant la troisième semaine de Septembre. Le groupe fut créé par nul autre que le roi d'Angleterre, Jean sans terre, en 1199, lorsque la région Aquitaine était sous domination anglaise.

En 1269 le port voisin de Libourne fut créé, ce qui a encouragé le commerce avec l'Angleterre, et le vin gagna en popularité lorsqu'il fut de plus en plus exporté. Cependant, la fin de la Guerre de Cent Ans et les guerres de religion suivantes endommagèrent considérablement ces liens commerciaux et les droits de la Jurade; il aura fallu attendre jusqu'en 1589 et qu'Henri IV rétablisse la paix dans la région, pour que la Jurade puisse à nouveau superviser la production de vin.

La Jurade connut un déclin au 18ème siècle et ce n'est qu'en 1948 que la Jurade fut réformée par un petit nombre de vignerons; le groupe devint à nouveau une fraternité et ambassadeur officiel pour le vin de qualité produit à Saint-Émilion, maintenant ainsi le site au patrimoine mondial de l'Unesco. Cette organisation prestigieuse célèbre la récolte sous forme d'une procession; un certain nombre de jurats, vêtus de robes rouges, avec environ 300 personnes, défilent dans la cité et se rendent à la Collégiale pour une messe. Une cérémonie d'initiation prend alors place à l'église monolithique, où les visiteurs venant des quatre coins du monde jurent allégeance au vin saint-émilionnais.

Point d'orgue de la célébration est le ban des vendanges, annoncé par les jurats au sommet de la Tour du Roy (*représenté ci-dessus*), d'où des ballons noirs sont lâchés, symbole des nouveaux raisins prêts à devenir vin.

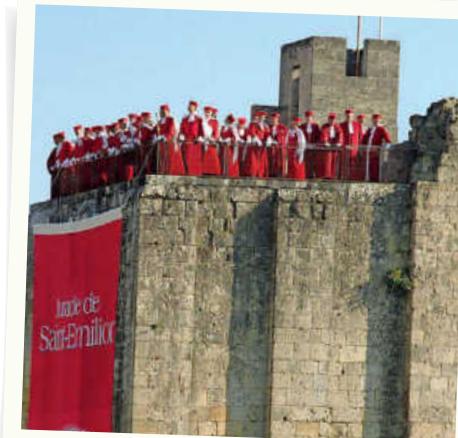
September in France is synonymous with the grape harvest, a time when all the winemakers' hard work is repaid with a bumper crop. While many towns and villages across France hold celebrations to mark the harvest, it is the medieval town of Saint-Émilion, near Bordeaux, which, thanks to its Jurade, puts on one of the best and most historic celebrations.

This wine fraternity is made up of around 100 *jurats*, who announce the grape harvest every year in the third week of September. The group was created by none other than England's King John in 1199, when the area of Aquitaine was under English rule.

In 1269 the nearby port of Libourne was created, which encouraged trade with England, and the popularity of the wine grew as exports increased. However, the end of the Hundred Years War and the subsequent religious wars greatly affected these trade links and the rights of the Jurade; it was not until 1589, when peace in the area was re-established under Henri IV, that the Jurade could return to supervising the production of wine.

The Jurade went into decline in the 18th century and it wasn't until 1948 that it was re-formed by a small number of winemakers. The group once again became a fraternity and was made the official ambassador for the high-quality wine produced in Saint-Émilion, which is now a Unesco World Heritage site. The prestigious organisation celebrates the harvest with a procession; a number of Jurats, dressed in red robes, are joined by around 300 guests to parade through the medieval town to the Collegiate Church where a ceremonial Mass is read. An initiation ceremony then takes place at the Monolithic Church, where guests from across the world swear allegiance to the town's wines.

The highlight is without doubt the harvest proclamation, announced by the *jurats* at the top of the Tour du Roy (*pictured above*), from where black balloons are released, a symbol of the new grapes which are ready to become wine. ☈



Word on the street:

The word '**canon**' usually refers to a collection of literary works, but it can also refer to someone's looks. '*C'est un vrai canon*' means a person is a real stunner.



IDIOMS

Guess the meaning of the idiom
'en faire tout un fromage'.

- a) To stir up trouble
- b) To make a mountain out of a molehill
- c) To be cheesed off



WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

Match these types of drinks
with their English equivalents

Pression	Still water
Eau plate	Draught beer
Panaché	Tap water
Tisane	Lager/light ale
Eau du robinet	Shandy
Blonde	Herbal tea

QUI SUIS-JE?

Lisez les indices ci-dessous
et devinez qui je suis

Je suis l'une des actrices les
plus connues de France.

En 1978 j'ai reçu le prix à Cannes
de la meilleure interprétation
féminine pour mon rôle dans
Violette Nozière.

J'ai été nominée 14 fois pour
les Césars.

Je suis...

5 WAYS TO SAY...

I'm happy

Je suis heureux
*This is the standard
phrase to mean that
you're happy.*

Je suis content
*This phrase translates
as 'I am pleased'.*

Je suis satisfait
*This phrase means
that you are
moderately pleased.*

J'ai la pêche
*This idiomatic phrase
translates as 'I feel
great'.*

Je suis ravi
*This is a stronger
word and means
'I am delighted'.*



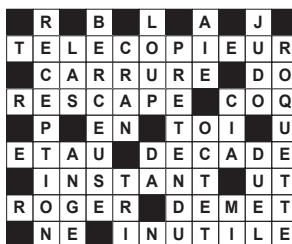
Fun French ANAGRAMS

Find these French parts of the body

- 1 **Lilhevce**
- 2 **Veonnloc belarétre**
- 3 **Tengpoi**
- 4 **Avegsi**
- 5 **Torgile sro**
- 6 **Piotenri**

Answers

What's on the menu? *Pression - dragnut beeet - eau plale - tlll wellebit paneclle - shanly tseae - idiom:* (B) To make a mouthful out of a mealiehill.
Tongue-twister. *Arnaqueurs: chevelli - arnaqueur - wrist visage - colonne vertebrile - spine; poignt - ancle; liste: Hpppter. Anagrasm: chevelli - big bee. Profite - chesst; - beebe: mes orteil - big bee. Profite - chesst; - beebe: liste: Hpppter. Anagrasm: chevelli - arnaqueur - wrist visage - colonne vertebrile - spine; poignt - ancle; liste: Hpppter. Anagrasm: chevelli - big bee. Profite - chesst;*
What's on the menu? *Pression - dragnut beeet - eau plale - tlll wellebit paneclle - shanly tseae - idiom:* (B) To make a mouthful out of a mealiehill.



Mots Fléchés winner

The winner of the July Mots Fléchés quiz is Mrs Susan Kortlandt, from Brentwood in Essex. The mystery town was Quimper.

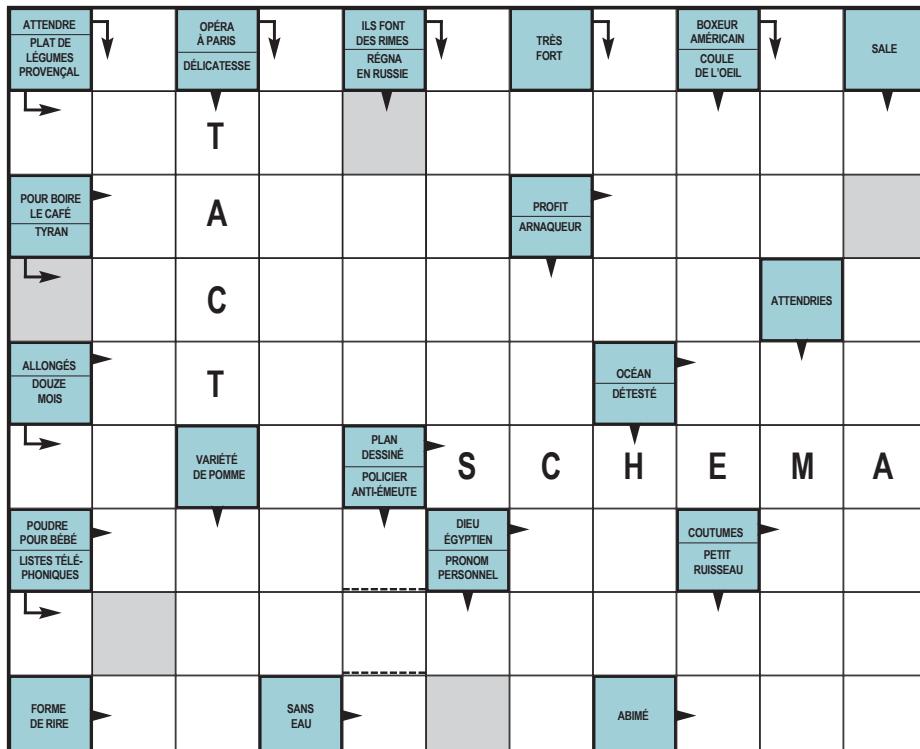
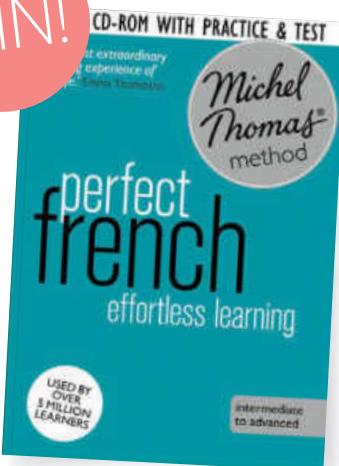
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Les Mots Fléchés

WIN!

The winner of this month's competition will receive the *Michel Thomas Perfect French* CD-audio course, published by Hodder & Stoughton. It will help intermediates take their French to the next level and gain confidence

without books, writing or striving to memorise everything. The pack, which retails at £100, contains ten hours of audio learning on CD, more than three hours of extra vocabulary help, a visual learning review and interactive exercises.



To enter: Complete Les Mots Fléchés grid and note all the letters in the grey squares. Rearrange these letters to spell a French town or city and send this answer, together with your name, telephone number and address, to: **FRANCE Magazine, Les Mots Fléchés, Cumberland House, Oriel Road, Cheltenham, GL50 1BB.** Entries close 2 September, 2015.

Last month's Les Mots Fléchés answers will be posted on our website www.francemag.com/quiz and appear in the October issue, on sale on 2 September, 2015. The answers to this month's competition will be on the website from 9 September, 2015 and in the November issue on sale on 7 October, 2015.

TONGUE-TWISTER

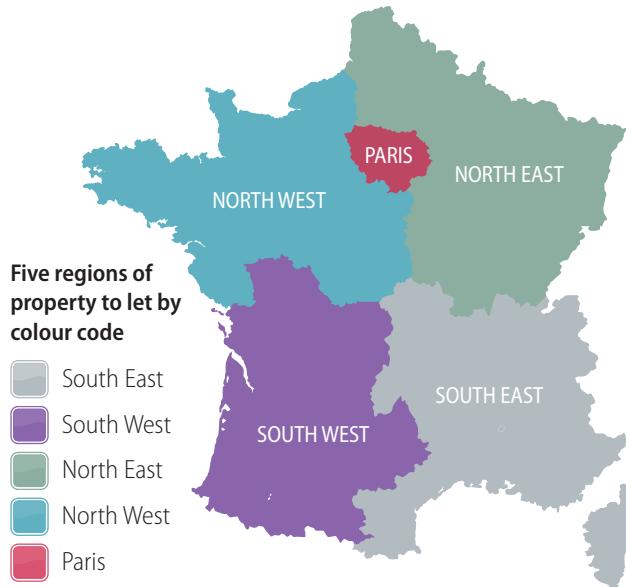
Slice up the baguette where the spaces should be

Un ange qui songea à changer de visage se trouva
soudain si changé que jamais plus il n'aura songea à se change

HOLIDAY PROPERTY TO LET

How to get the most from our extensive rental section

Simply choose the region you are interested in and browse through the selection of properties. Our simple key will tell you all you need to know about the rental property of your choice. Though many will be listed with French telephone numbers, most will be answered by English speakers, unless otherwise stated.



KEY

- 1 Full colour picture
- 2 Département number
- 3 Nearest town
- 4 Département name
- 5 Sleeping capacity
- 6 Property description
- 7 Weekly rental range (in £ or €)
- 8 Contact details

Numbers 9–16 are distances in km, O/S for On-site and N/P for details Not Provided.

- 9 Nearest supermarket
- 10 Nearest airport
- 11 Nearest beach/swimming
- 12 Nearest tennis
- 13 Nearest golf
- 14 Nearest horseriding
- 15 Nearest restaurant
- 16 Nearest tourist attraction

2 → 
1 →
3 → **COLLIoure, PYRÉNÉES-ORIENTALES** → 4
5 → **CAPACITY: 2-4**
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1 20 10 11 1 20 5 1 14 15 16
9 10 11 12 13

PROPERTY IN THE NORTH WEST



L'EPINAY LE COMTE

CAPACITY: 2

New gite now available for bookings.
THE HAYLOFT
Completed to a high standard étude thermique, this part barn conversion offers very attractive and spacious split level accommodation for two people. Features include original exposed beams and an A frame window overlooking countryside in the lounge which is on the first floor. Dedicated wi-fi, TV, DVD & radio/CD player.

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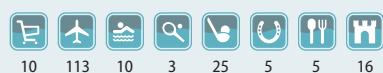
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CAPACITY: 1-4

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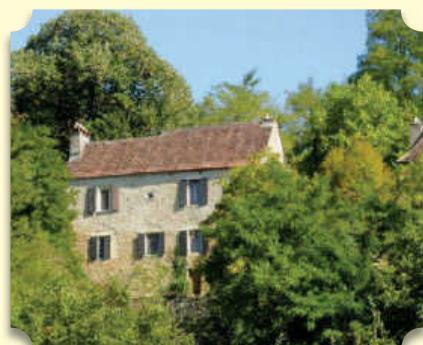
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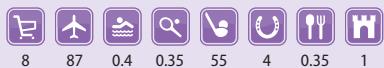
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When did you make your first trip to France?

My uncle was really into wine and food, so we went over several times with my cousins when I was a child and made a road trip. He used to rent a place in Bandol [a resort on the Mediterranean] and we stopped on the way in a bed and breakfast. He was a great cook, so we ate in all the time or had picnics on the beach.

Why did you buy a home in Giens (east of Toulon)?

I don't like the tourist traps but do enjoy the food, wine and climate of the south coast of France. If you've been on TV for a while you don't want to go somewhere with lots of English people. I had been looking for somewhere that wasn't an obvious place to visit – and that end of the Riviera wasn't easy to reach when I bought the house there; you had to go to either Marseilles or Nice and then it would be a two-hour drive. Giens is a beautiful, quintessentially French town with a small church on the hill and they have an annual festival when the fishermen take their painted boats out and throw flowers on the sea. It's very rural.

What else did you like about the area?

It has a lovely microclimate; being on the tip of a little curve of the Riviera means it gets the most amazing weather. In August, when all the other beaches and tourist spots are busy, people go over to the island of Porquerolles (*pictured right*), which is part of a national park. It's much quieter as there is nothing really there. We just took a picnic and sat on the beach. The water is crystal clear and in summer can reach 22°C. It's idyllic.



My France Jenny Powell

The television presenter tells **Andrew Williams** about childhood holidays in France and owning a house in a Riviera hideaway

What was the house like?

It was a proper Provence house with wooden shutters – ones that were for use, not fake ones stuck on the wall. It was built by a fisherman and had a big kitchen because he used to invite his friends

round. The house was only seven years old when I got it. There were all types of trees – peach, plum, pomegranate and almond – the sort of thing you would write a novel about if you were having a midlife crisis. I sold it six



years ago. I didn't want the house to go to a foreigner, so we sold it to a woman who had been working in the north of France but was from Giens and wanted to move back when she retired. It was refreshing to find a place that was so natural and uncommercialised. We stayed there for a couple of months every summer. We went once for the new year, and that was lovely. We went up to Saint-Tropez, where they had an ice rink in the square, which was great.

How is your French?

It was all right, but it's not good anymore. You have to make an effort. I understood a lot more than I could say and was able to order things and be polite to people. Hyères is the area's main town, which has more boats coming in and more bars. I once tried to order a red wine and the barman said he didn't understand what I was saying because I didn't emphasise the last syllable in 'vin rouge' enough. The accents can change so much from region to region.

Have you ever been to France for work?

I've done programmes from all over the world, but the only time I worked in France was when I was a children's TV presenter and covered the opening of Disneyland Paris in 1992. But there's nothing particularly French about it – if there were any regional variation someone would be sacked.

Jenny Powell has recently presented *Food and Wine Adventures in Romania* with French wine expert Olivier Magny on The Travel Channel. Follow her on Twitter @JennyPowellTV. 

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